SHAFTS FROM AN EASTERN QUIVER

BY

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Shafts from an Eastern Quiver by Charles J. Mansford
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1. The Diamonds of Shomar's Queen
2. The Jasper Vale of the Falling Star
3. The Black Horsemen of Nisha the Seer
4. Darak, the Scorn of the Afghans
5. The Sword-Hilt of the Idol at Delhi
6. The Hindu Fakir of the Silent City
7. Margarita, the Bond Queen of the Wandering Dhahs
8. The Masked Ruler of the Black Wreckers
9. Maw-Sayah: The Keeper of the Great Burman Nat
10. The Hunted Tribe of Three Hundred Peaks
11. In Quest of the Lost Galleon
12. The Daughter of Lovetski the Lost

Shafts from an Eastern Quiver.

I.—THE DIAMONDS OF SHOMAR'S QUEEN.

By Charles J. Mansford, B.A.

I.

"I FANCY that Hassan has been drawing on his imagination again, old fellow," said my companion, Frank Denviers, as we sat conversing one evening at the door of our tent.

"Perhaps so," I responded, puffing away at a hookah; "he has his faults, like the rest of these Arabs. To appropriate everything that he can lay his brown paws on is, to him, a cardinal virtue; still, he hasn't told us anything untrue so far, why should he do so now?

"You have far too much faith in that nigger," replied Frank; "he pitches yarns to us that no one could possibly believe. We certainly expected him to steal, and, so far, he has come well up to the standard we measured him by. I own that his knowledge of the various ruins to which he has led us is decidedly good; no doubt this wonderful city that we are bound for does exist, but, as to the diamonds—don't you wish you may get them!" And he shouted to Hassan, who was a little distance off reclining under the shade of a palm tree—

"Coffee, and hurry about it too!" for the Arab was accustomed to take his time when disturbed from his siesta, although usually he was agile enough.

Our Arab servant, or "nigger" as my companion sometimes termed him, had been engaged as a runner or letter carrier, until it chanced that we took him into our service on the recommendation of an Arab sheik. Frank Denviers and I, Harold Derwent, had been for some time wandering in Arabia, and already had been to most of the famous cities visited by Europeans. Previous to setting out on our present strange quest we had disguised ourselves as sheiks and secretly visited Mecca just as the *haj*, or annual pilgrimage, was commencing. For the whole time through which the fair lasted we found thousands of pilgrims who poured into Mecca from Persia, Arabia, Egypt, and Syria well worthy of observation, as they came to be blessed at the birthplace of Mahomet.

"HASSAN."

Hassan had been of great service to us in the sacred city, and his desire to continue with us probably induced him to tell us the legend of the "Diamonds of Sho-

mar's Queen," when he received an intimation that we thought of returning to England, when his employment as our guide would, of course, cease. His features were bronzed with sun and exposure to the wind, so that he seemed even more swarthy than the rest of his tribe, while the spotless white turban which he invariably wore served to heighten the effect still further. Besides his experience, which had benefited us considerably in our travels, he was a man upon whom we could depend in time of danger, for his bravery had more than once been put to the test when our course lay through unsettled districts. Added to these qualities he had an admirable way of relating in his own language the various legends which are connected with many of the singular ruins which we visited. It was chiefly owing to this power that Frank came to the conclusion that the Arab was accustomed to mix fables and facts together until he was unable to distinguish between them.

It was our custom when the day had declined to sit before our tent and listen to Hassan as he recounted some one of his numerous legends. While we drank our coffee the Arab would throw himself at full length upon the ground, and, resting his chin upon his crossed arms, look away dreamily into the distance. His voice then assumed a different tone; he was no longer the servant of two Englishmen but a child of the East, and one who sometimes seemed to forget that we were present at all.

It happened that one evening during our stay in Mecca, where, for the time being, we enjoyed the luxury of a roof other than that of our tent, a pilgrim passed by who differed considerably from any of those we had already seen. We were sitting at the door, and summoned Hassan to tell, if he could, the district from which the stranger came. Eyeing him closely, the Arab described him as one living in the neighbourhood of Metra, a city of ruins, but which still possessed an absorbing interest for those who knew its history and what it contained.

When Hassan had excited our curiosity sufficiently, he suddenly stopped, and asked when we intended to return to England. Hearing the time fixed upon, he made an expressive gesture, and replied—

"Then the great secret of Metra will not be known to you. The city is twenty leagues from here, yet it is worth a visit; aye, and more, it has that in it which would astonish the sahibs to see."

"Very likely," responded Frank; "all these places you have taken us to have been surprising in their way, but one gets tired even of wonders."

"The sahib is speaking true," responded Hassan, "but this wonder is the greatest of them all. The stranger, whom you have just noticed, knows well what is hidden in Metra, but he dare not venture thither for his life——"

"And you, Hassan," I interrupted, "have you seen this wonder of which you speak?" He gave a gesture of assent as he answered—

"I have seen the city, but have not viewed its treasure; no Arab could look upon it and live, for, by the beard of Mahomet, if he ventured there, surely kismet would follow him in Shomar's name."

"Well," said Frank, "if you want to persuade us to travel there, you had better tell us what the city does contain if you know; I daresay, like all your yarns, it is strictly genuine, considered from the standard of an Arab code of morals."

That same evening Hassan related to us the legend, and the result of it was that we agreed not only to visit the city, but to give him a sum of gold if our enterprise proved successful, for he would not accept our offer of a share in the treasure.

So matters stood, and our tent was at this time within a few miles of the city to which we were bound when the conversation between Frank and myself took place as narrated. Hassan, when called, came slowly forward and disappeared within the tent, soon afterwards reappearing with the beverage which he had been ordered to prepare.

"When will the sahibs be ready to visit the city of Metra?" Hassan asked, as he stood before us.

"You say it is but three miles hence," said Frank, "and it now wants two hours to sunset; I think we might venture there to-day." Then, eyeing the Arab, he asked—

"Do you still declare that this treasure is to be found there, or is it, after all, one existing only in your own imagination?"

"The sahib is not ready of belief," replied the Arab, "but he will soon learn that I have spoken the truth."

"Rest there," said Frank, pointing to the ground just before our feet, "and repeat this story, that we may be able to judge of your sincerity."

Hassan posed his body in the usual attitude which he assumed on such occasions,

and, while Frank and I listened to his narrative, to detect if possible any discrepancies, the Arab half spoke, half chanted to us the legend of "The Diamonds of Shomar's Queen," as he had heard it from the inhabitants of the district around Metra.

II.

"In Arabia the Happy," began Hassan, "there ruled, more than two thousand years ago, a famous king named Shomar—"

"A legend of the good old times, evidently," interrupted Frank, as he looked at the Arab with an incredulous air.

"Shomar," continued the narrator, "was powerful but he was not happy, for among the princes of his court was one who had great wealth and influence. He did not address the king in the humble tones which the rest of the courtiers adopted, and soon grew into disfavour. The ambassadors, who came at this time from the court of Persia, paid such marked deference to the prince that Shomar's jealousy was aroused, and he sought for some opportunity to free himself from this subject, whom he feared might one day seize upon his throne. Then arose a rumour that, in a distant part of Arabia, a revolt had arisen, and Shomar accused the prince of having instigated it. The latter hotly denied the charge, and, as the king persisted in it, drew his sword as if about to attack the monarch as he sat on his throne. There was a cry of 'treason!' which rang through the palace, and in another minute the prince was vainly struggling with his monarch's bodyguard.

"Shomar looked triumphantly at his subject as the latter stood bound before him, a few days afterwards, to listen to the sentence which his offence was to receive. The king would gladly have ordered the executioner to bowstring the hateful subject, but he feared the effect of this upon the people. So the prince was sentenced to perpetual exile in a remote district, and threatened with death if he returned. Setting out with his wife and young daughter, together with a few faithful servants, the prince reached the place of his banishment, and for several years nothing more was heard of him.

"One day a band of pilgrims passed through the king's territory, and one of them craved an audience of the monarch. He conveyed strange tidings to the king, for the exiled prince had founded a wonderful city, Metra, to which we are bound;" and the Arab paused for a moment.

"Go on," said Frank; "we are waiting to hear about these diamonds which you mentioned before."

"THERE WAS A CRY OF 'TREASON.'"

"Patience!" replied Hassan, "you shall hear. The prince, after wandering about for a year or so, determined to build a city, but feared lest his monarch, hearing of it, should send a body of soldiers afterwards to demolish the edifices. During his journeys he had passed more than once through a mighty ravine in the rocks, and a strange thought occurred to him. He communicated his views to his companions in exile, and they agreed to his proposal. The rocks on each side of the ravine were com-

posed of a stone which resembled marble in its colour and hardness, yet they began to excavate it, and before long had hollowed out several caves for themselves. Then the prince—who was still wealthy—promised an enormous diamond to whoever would carve best a palace for him. Skilful men came, and, eager for the promised reward, laboured incessantly; before long the ravine became a pathway on either side of which magnificent marble palaces stretched one after another for over three miles, and the inhospitable place now became a city more beautiful than poets have dreamed of. To own a palace in Metra became the height of a prince's ambition, and over them all the exiled one ruled. When he died his daughter, who had grown to be a beautiful woman, took her father's place and ruled as the Princess Idaliah——"

"Who possessed these diamonds, I think you told us," interposed Frank. The Arab seemed to scarcely notice the interruption, and went on—

"So the princes who dwelt in the marble palaces of Metra wooed the princess, but without success, for she secretly despised them. During her childhood, while her father was still a wandering exile, she had come to know a young and hardy mountaineer, and the friendship of childhood grew deeper and stronger as they became older. Her suitors hated the mountaineer, but were afraid to show this, so they planned how they might rid themselves of him. The pilgrim who conveyed the information to Shomar of the wonderful city arisen was sent by them. The king, on hearing of the beauty of Idaliah, determined to see her, and shortly afterwards visited her palace in disguise. If the princes admired her, the king did more; he was infatuated, and, after trying in vain to win her love, made known his real rank. Then said the princess, as she sat on her throne while the monarch flung himself in entreaty before her—

"'Rise, I am but thy inferior; it is not fitting that the great Shomar should wed with a subject. There are dark-eyed maidens at the Courts of Persia and the other neighbouring realms, there wilt thou find a princess of royal blood whom thou mayest thus honour;' and she stretched out her hand as if to raise the monarch from his lowly position. The latter caught it eagerly and pressed it to his lips, while a burning blush suffused the princess's features. Then she said humbly, with downcast eyes—

"'Know, O King, that the love of Idaliah is already pledged——'

"'To whom?' asked the monarch, rising and standing before the princess, furious at his own want of success. Then Idaliah told, with many a becoming blush and sigh, of the young mountaineer. Shomar's face grew

"THE MONARCH FLUNG HIMSELF IN ENTREATY BEFORE HER."

dark as the story was concluded, then he asked—

"'And, if he lived not, wouldst thou accept the half of my throne?' The princess shook her head negatively as she replied—

"'I could not, for I would lament him many years; my heart even tells me that, if evil befell him, I should die.'

So the king departed from her presence, and plotted with the princes to take the mountaineer's life. Although Haifiz, as he was called, dared not pass through the ravine, because of his rivals, yet by stealth he would visit Idaliah. Lithe and active, he climbed down the rocky slope between two of the palaces; a jutting piece of stone, the slight support of a young tree, anything that he could grasp was sufficient for him, for was not this perilous pathway that which led to the palace where the light of love shone for him alone in the eyes of Idaliah." Hassan paused for a moment; then his voice grew softer and his eyes moist as he sorrowfully continued—

"HE FELL HEADLONG DOWN THE STEEP RAVINE."

"Now the princess used to place a light in the window of the highest apartment of her palace, and the rivals of Haifiz discovered this signal to the lover that all was safe for his venture. They observed the way in which he had hitherto escaped their ambushes, and at last had him in their power. One night Idaliah had placed the signal as usual, and, sitting on her throne adorned with a magnificent diamond necklace, which had been given to her by her father, she waited for the well-known footsteps of her lover. He did not come, and an uneasy feeling filled the maiden's breast as she waited; then a noise was heard of steps resounding on the marble palace floor.

Four men entered, bearing a heavy burden, which they placed at the feet of the unhappy princess. A tree by which the lover was accustomed to swing himself from one ledge to another had been partly uprooted, for, on taking it in his hands, it gave way, and he fell headlong down the steep ravine, bruised and lifeless! So the body was sent for the princess to view, for the enemies of her lover rejoiced in the success of their foul stratagem.

"Idaliah looked at the mangled form for a moment, then, sighing deeply, was silent. So still she sat, that at last the bearers of the burden attempted to arouse her. They started back in horror, for the princess was as pale and lifeless as her lover! She seemed to have been turned to stone by the terrible shock.

"When Shomar heard this, he was struck with sorrow at the effect of his callous plot. He commanded that the city should be deserted by its inhabitants, and vowed that the princess should bear his name in death, for although he lived many years after people spake of the dead princess alone as Shomar's queen. The palace was left untouched; no one dared to move the bodies of the dead lovers. The strangest part of the narrative is, that for all the time which has ensued the forms have not changed. Idaliah sits there to-day, and her lover lies at her feet, as if the two figures had been carved out of marble. When

Shomar, years after, learnt this, he gave the palace into the charge of an old crone, upon whose death the duty passed into the hands of the oldest living female in her tribe—the same as that of the man concerning whose country you questioned me. Although this event happened, as you have been told, more than two thousand years ago, there is still an old crone who fulfils Shomar's command, and only opens the palace gate on receiving a certain signal. Sitting there is Idaliah, still wearing the necklace of diamonds, which no Arab may touch, for Shomar, although dead, yet haunts the palace, and prays the maiden's pardon for his crime. His curse would blight the one of my race who touched the sparkling stones: will ye, then, dare to venture thither to obtain them?"

Hassan rose and stood before us as he finished the legend.

"Do you know this signal?" I asked, endeavouring to speak calmly. The Arab answered in the affirmative, whereupon Frank remarked—

"I will believe that the lovers still occupy the palace, and that the diamonds are there, when I see them;" and he smiled at my faith in the truth of the Arab's story.

III.

At sunset we left our tent, and, following Hassan, journeyed in the direction of Metra. At last our guide stopped, and when we had joined him, he observed:

"We are just about to enter the ravine. What plan is to be adopted in order that you may enter the palace we are seeking?"

"You say that the gates are kept by one person only," I replied; "surely if they are opened upon your giving the signal, we should have no difficulty in passing into the palace."

"The sahib is mistaken," responded Hassan, "for the gates are solid stone, and move by touching a spring within. It will be difficult for you: the crone will not suspect an Arab, but, on seeing two men of an unknown nation, she will have little confidence in you."

"Then," interposed Frank, turning to me, "our plan is easily settled. On arriving at these stone gates, Hassan may give the signal, and enter alone. He can learn from within the secret of the hidden spring; this done he must find some way to escape the crone's observation, and so let us into the palace."

"The crone is exceedingly aged," said Hassan; "if once we are all within there should be no difficulty in keeping her from doing harm; but I would rather not remain in the palace while you obtain the treasure."

"Yet," said Frank to me aside, "he has no objection to lead us to this place where the diamonds are said to be! It is a strange scruple; still, if he objects to remain with us, we will leave him outside, where he may be useful as a guard should anyone learn that we are plundering the palace."

We plunged through a dense thicket; on emerging we observed that the ravine then began and sloped gently. On we went, our faith in Hassan being strengthened each minute as we saw the wonderful palaces carved out of the solid rock, and standing almost unaffected apparently by the length of time that had elapsed. Casually resting my hand for a moment upon one of the chiselled doorways, I observed that it crumbled into dust as I did so. Hassan informed me that something which exhaled from the rock gave it an outward appearance of being hard and highly polished, although in reality the substance was decomposed.

Passing along we at last reached a magnificent palace, and before it loomed gigantic marble gates. My hope that these were also decayed by age vanished, for, on striking one of them with the hilt of my dagger, it gave forth a dull sound. We looked well to the condition of the pistols which were worn in our belts, and then motioned to Hassan to give the signal. Crouching behind a pillar, so that we could not be observed, we waited anxiously to see what would be the result. The Arab had evidently learned the right signal to give, for suddenly the marble gates were raised like a portcullis, and a strange-looking being screamed rather than said to him:

"Can ye not let Shomar's queen reign over the dead one in peace?" She was indeed aged; her form was nearly doubled, her eyes, like small black beads, looked forth from a yellow shrunken face, while the hand which she raised almost threateningly at Hassan bore nails that seemed like the talons of some bird of prey.

"I come from where once dwelt Shomar," said the Arab, then he stooped forward, and whispered something to her. The crone allowed him to pass, and before we could see more the gates fell instantaneously into their former position. It was fully ten minutes before they lifted again. In a second Frank and I darted through the

entry. Hassan was barely outside before the gates once more descended with a dull thud, and we were shut within the palace.

"We are in for it, I expect," said Frank; "there was no time to ask Hassan how these gates unfasten. Look at the old crone, she has discovered the trick!"

It was an evil-looking face that peered into ours, and for a moment my hand wandered to where my dagger was placed. Frank pushed her aside, and strode on in the direction of the main apartment, according to the information which Hassan had given us of its whereabouts. I followed closely, the crone raising wild howls of rage as we went along, even throwing herself several times before us, and trying to bar our way with her distorted body. The palace seemed perfect; not a stone nor a carving showed marks of age. There was an immense curtain of a material resembling purple velvet before us. We dragged it back upon the golden rods which supported it, and then stood still for a minute, completely astonished at what we saw.

"IT WAS AN EVIL LOOKING FACE."

Sumptuous furniture of the East filled the apartment. There were magnificent burnished mirrors hanging upon the walls, which themselves were a mass of minute carvings representing battle scenes and other events of those bygone years. The skins of many animals lay about the apartment, and in the centre of it stood the throne of the one who is known in the Arabic legends as Shomar's queen.

A ray of light seemed to enter from above, and fell upon the throne. There, seated upon it, was a form whose loveliness seemed more than human. Her face, and bust, and snowy arms seemed as if carved out of the material of which the palace was constructed. Her robes were fitting for the rank which she had occupied in life, while at her feet lay the murdered form of her lover! My heart beat violently and I turned to my companion, as I said excitedly—

"Hassan has told us the truth! Do you see them?" and I pointed to the diamonds that flashed like stars around the neck of the princess.

Frank was silent for a moment, then he answered—

"Who could have expected such a story to be true? It seems like robbery to remove the diamonds, but they are useless to the dead, and to us mean an immense fortune."

We passed up to the centre figures in the palace chamber. The crone guessed our intention, and, flinging herself upon Frank, vented her fury upon him. He seized her, and, despite her struggles, held her fast as he called to me:—

"Quick! get the diamonds, while I keep this hag away from you."

I stretched forth my hand nervously and clasped the diamonds. As I did so the form which wore them seemed to change, then suddenly it disappeared, and nothing but a small heap of dust was to be seen! The perspiration stood in beads upon my forehead; I turned to Frank to see if he had observed what had happened, but he was still engaged in keeping the hag from attacking me. I drew off the silken sash which I wore and rolled the diamonds within it, as I said:

"I have obtained them—quick! to the gates! I am nearly suffocated in this close atmosphere."

He lifted the crone bodily into the air, and, holding her thus, passed with me to the entrance. Here she sullenly refused to show us the hidden spring, and, in spite of our threats, remained obdurate. It was some time before we could devise a way of escaping. At last I managed to scrape a hole in the side of the entry near the gates, and into this we thrust as many cartridges as we could spare. Breaking some of them open, I laid a small train, and, keeping as far away as possible, managed to make a spark and thus to fire it.

"QUICK! GET THE DIAMONDS."

There was a tremendous explosion, which resounded through the empty palace, and to our joy a hole was blasted sufficiently large for a man to creep through. I passed through it first, then Frank hurled the crone from him and followed me. We could hear her howls of disappointment at our escape, as Hassan rejoined us, who was elated at our success, and the knowledge that the reward which we had promised him would soon be his.

The diamonds were bought from us eventually by a syndicate of London merchants, the largest one of the stones alone being of more value than we had anticipated the entire necklace of seventeen to be worth. The wearers of them, as they see the light sparkling from the gems, little suppose that they are adorned with the diamonds of Shomar's queen.

We did not part with Hassan after all, for we decided to extend our travels eastward, owing to the success of this strange adventure.

Shafts from an Eastern Quiver.

II.—THE JASPER VALE OF THE FALLING STAR.

By Charles J. Mansford, B.A.

"By all that's wonderful!" exclaimed Denviers. "Look yonder, Harold!" and he pointed towards a jagged ridge which rose in majestic grandeur from the mighty volcanic valley of the Lar.

I turned my glance in the direction indicated by my companion, and, for a moment, could not give utterance to my surprise at the strange sight.

"The woman must be mad," I blurted out at last; "one false step, or even a breath of wind, will send her headlong down to the valley beneath, a shapeless and lifeless mass."

"Yet that fate would bring her rest and forgetfulness," said Hassan, who stood with us gazing from the height of the Aftcha Pass. There was a strange pathos in the Arab's voice as he spoke, and Denviers, knowing that Hassan had uttered the truth concerning our recent visit to Petra, was silent.

Leaving Petra, we had travelled eastward again, and at last found ourselves traversing this grand pass; for we were now in the heart of Persia, a country which we knew would amply repay us for the long, dreary journey which led from the scene of our last adventure in Arabia.

"THE WOMAN MUST BE MAD!"

Owing to the intense heat of the day, we travelled only between sunset and sunrise, passing the rest of the time within the beautifully woven tent which Hassan had procured for us on entering Persia, in place of the rough camel-skin covering which had sheltered us from the sun in Arabia.

At the foot of the pass we had bargained with a nomadic Hilyat for the possession of two black Afghan horses on which we rode, Hassan leading the sumpter mules laden with our baggage.

It was a weird spectacle which met our eyes as we stood gazing at the snow-clad crest of Demavend in the distance, the silvery Lar winding its way down in the valley beneath, while around us were mountain tops, separated by the precipices on either side of the spot on which we stood.

In the moonlight that streamed down and flooded the topmost ridge of the mountain before us, stood a woman with her hair hanging in tangled masses, framing the beauty of her olive complexion and lustrous eyes as it fell over her shoulders in wild profusion. The white garment which clothed her was encircled at the waist by a belt, which flashed as the rays of the moon fell upon the jewels which studded it. The expression of an infinite sadness which stamped her features seemed well in accord with Hassan's remark.

"Do you know her history?" asked Denviers, in response to the vague words of Hassan.

"The child of Arabia's desert, to whom the lore of these Eastern countries is known, has indeed heard her story, but it will be-

comes the Sunnee, as a true worshipper and a believer in Mahomet, to speak of the hateful Sheahs." I knew how deep the jealousy of the Arabs and Persians was, as to the merits of their respective claims as true followers of the Prophet, but Hassan had never before refused to satisfy our curiosity whenever able. Indeed, as Denviers often hinted, when facts failed him, Hassan was quite able to narrate some story of which we could only conclude he was the originator.

"Come, Hassan," said Denviers, "I don't suppose the Prophet will object to our hearing what brings this woman here, far away from the haunts of her race." The Arab's face only seemed to become more resolute at this remark.

"I will not speak of the false Sheahs," he responded almost angrily; "seek from the woman herself the information which you desire." I looked in surprise, first at Hassan, then into Denviers' face.

"Don't rouse his fanatical prejudices, whatever you do," I whispered; "we cannot afford to quarrel with him just now; after all, Hassan has been more faithful to us by far than most of his fraternity would have been."

I stopped suddenly. The woman had observed us, and, uttering a plaintive cry, as of some hunted animal, began to descend the mountain side. My head grew dizzy as I saw her clinging with her delicate hands to projections of the mountain to steady herself as she made her way down the almost perpendicular slope. We sprang from our horses and stood watching her with astonishment.

"SHE BEGAN TO DESCEND THE MOUNTAIN SIDE."

"Look here, Harold," said Denviers, "I feel certain that there is something very strange recorded with regard to this woman. Hassan is not usually so reticent; I have a good mind to scale the precipice on this side, and to meet her as she reaches the valley below."

I moved close to the edge of the rocky path which formed the pass along which we had journeyed, and then looked shudderingly down.

"I doubt whether you would reach the bottom alive or not," I responded; "there are possibly plenty of adventures in store for us without risking this descent. Still, I too feel a strange desire to learn this woman's history, and if you run the risk of climbing down I will certainly follow." Denviers turned to Hassan, who seemed to take little interest in the conversation.

"You can wait here till we have reached the valley below, then make for the road towards Demavend. After proceeding a farsakh (four miles), pitch the tent, there we will endeavour to rejoin you at daybreak to-morrow." The Arab bent his head obediently, and stood with folded arms to watch the mad attempt which we were about to make. A minute afterwards Denviers was cautiously making his way down the side of the precipice. I gave one glance at the white-clad figure of the woman, who was now two hundreds yards below, then, with a determination to abide by Denviers in the hazardous attempt, began to follow him.

In spite of the utmost caution we slipped

and tumbled time after time, while the jagged projections tore our garments and lacerated our hands and feet badly, for we had bared the later for the purpose of obtaining a firmer foothold than we might otherwise have done. How long the descent really occupied we could scarcely tell; but, with death so imminent, each minute seemed to us an eternity.

Half way down we stopped for a moment, and, resting on a shelving piece of the mountain, looked across to where the woman was. She still outdistanced us in the descent, but we were surely though slowly gaining upon her.

"We shall reach the valley as soon as she does," said Denviers. "It is a terrible strain, but we must go on now, to return would be impossible." He scrambled down the side of the rock on which we had rested, and when he had descended about twenty yards I followed.

Exhausted, and with every bone in our bodies aching, we reached the valley at last, and, like two men who had just escaped death, we grasped each other's hand firmly for a moment. Then we crossed the valley and hastened in the direction where we observed the woman had just descended.

The silence which she had hitherto maintained, save for that one solitary cry, was broken; for, on seeing us in pursuit of her, she gave utterance to wild, weird screams of fear, and fled down the valley. We followed closely, and saw her disappear in a long jagged fissure which seemed as if it had been made by a shaft of lightning quivering through the solid rock. Through this gap we went, and in a few minutes emerged into a second valley, led thither by the fugitive.

As soon as she reached this spot, the woman stopped, and seemed to have forgotten altogether that we were pursuing her. So strange were the surroundings, and so brilliant was the scene which met our gaze, that we hesitated to approach her, and, hiding in a slight hollow, shadowed partly from the moon's rays, we looked closely at the woman's face—beautiful even amid the wonders which the valley disclosed.

We held a whispered conversation as to the best method in which we might get her to converse with us without fear, and finally we determined to await the course of events, which we thought might help on our desire

II.

The valley which we had entered was entirely composed of a wondrous jasper of a yellowish tinge, which seemed at intervals to become blue or crimson, while from its sides, which were elaborately carved with Eastern designs, there arose at the far end what appeared to us to be the remains of a gigantic portal, fully a hundred feet in height. Above was the blue sky, spangled with stars, among which one, larger than the rest, seemed to shed its silver rays upon the valley below, not less intense than did the crescent moon.

The form of the woman seemed to move about as if it were the ghost of some one risen from the grave to haunt the scene of its former joys or sorrows. Presently from out of a small embrasure was drawn some material which she kindled, and then, lying partly prone before it, she fixed her gaze intently on the glowing embers, glancing occasionally at the star shining in splendour above. As her eyes seemed to become yet more fixed upon the fire, Denviers cautiously advanced, and motioned to me to follow. He moved to where the woman was, and, reaching the place, quietly seated himself opposite to her. I followed his example, and was surprised to observe that, in spite of our presence, the woman's eyes were not directed towards us. I felt a strange nervous feeling run through me at the silence which reigned around us, unbroken by any of the three beings gathered round the fire.

Glancing at the woman's face again, I observed that her features seemed to be wrapped in a trance-like repose, although her eyes still shone full and lustrous.

"We would know why it is that you wander here alone, nor fear the terrors of the night?" Denviers ventured to say, in a tone which seemed to me strangely subdued and calm. The woman's lips parted, and she answered in Arabic:—

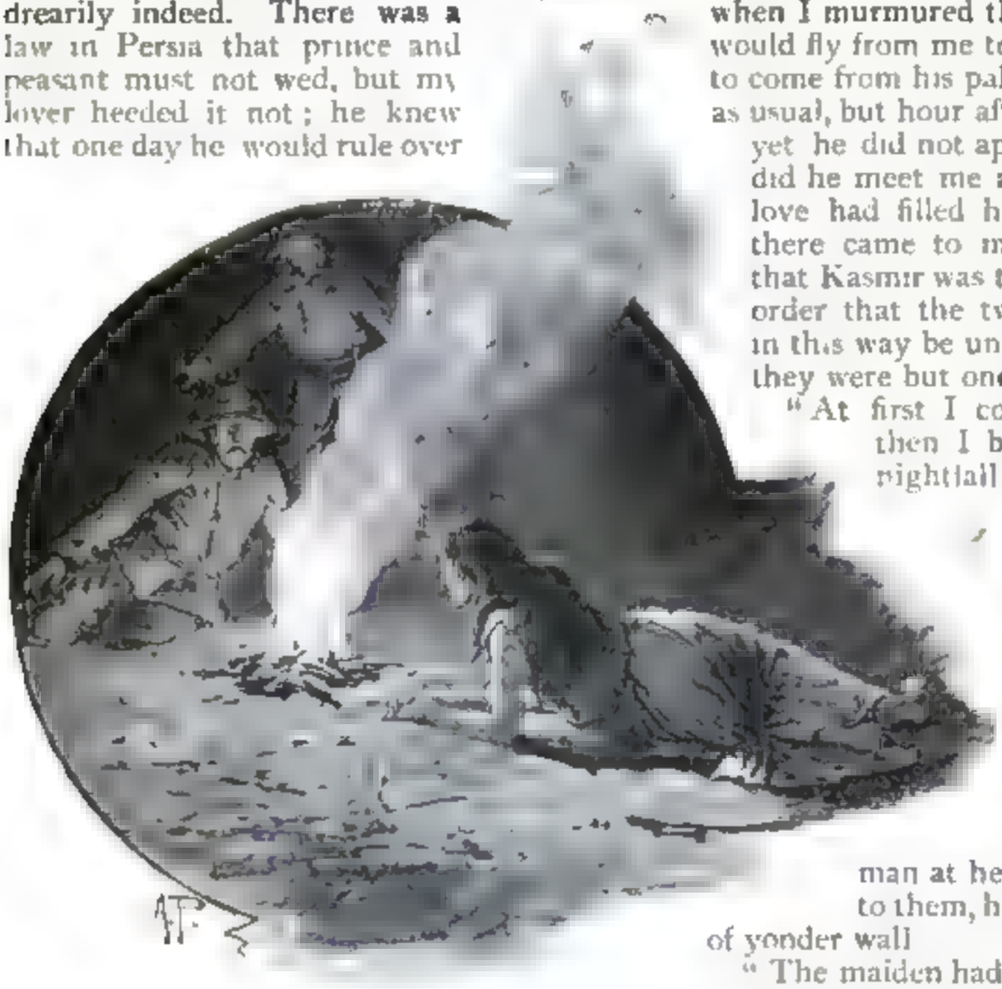
"Why seek ye to learn? Are not the sorrows of one sufficient for that one to bear?"

"I know not," responded Denviers, "but thou, fair as a flower, surely hast no cause for sorrow."

"Listen and decide," answered the woman, "then will ye know what troubles my spirit, for I am destined to wander without rest because of the deed which was mine when Prince Kasmir lived in this land." She paused and glanced again at the star above, while, for a moment, the deep impress of sorrow returned to her countenance as she did so. Then, looking once more into the glowing embers, she continued:—

"Years ago, when this glittering valley

was the courtyard of a prince's palace, I was the beloved of Prince Kasmir. In his presence the hours would fly as if they were minutes, while without him time passed drearily indeed. There was a law in Persia that prince and peasant must not wed, but my lover heeded it not; he knew that one day he would rule over this country, and such a law he vowed should not be suffered to exist.



"LOOKING INTO THE GLOWING EMBERS."

"Every night, when those within the palace were asleep, he would steal out and wander side by side with me through the valleys down to the lotus-kissed waters of the Lar, which flows not far from here. Beneath the shade of a friendly tree was hidden a boat, and, entering it, we voyaged together, his oars keeping time to the melodies which we sang together of love and its eternity.

"Before the grey dawn came stealing with ghostly raiment up the vale, we would return; he to the palace and I to the humble tent wherefrom I nightly stole. Happy indeed were we, until in an evil hour the queen of a country on the far borders of Arabia came to visit the Persian land. Standing among the crowd of peasants and nomads that thronged the palace gate, I saw the long retinue pass in, and lastly a regal woman was borne upon a sumptuous litter, and by her side walked my adored, Prince Kasmir.

"He had told me of the expected coming of this Eastern queen, but had laughed when I murmured that perhaps his love would fly from me to her. He promised to come from his palace the next night as usual, but hour after hour passed and yet he did not appear. Never again did he meet me as of old, for a new love had filled his breast, and then there came to me strange rumours that Kasmir was to wed the queen, in order that the two countries might in this way be united, and ruled as if they were but one.

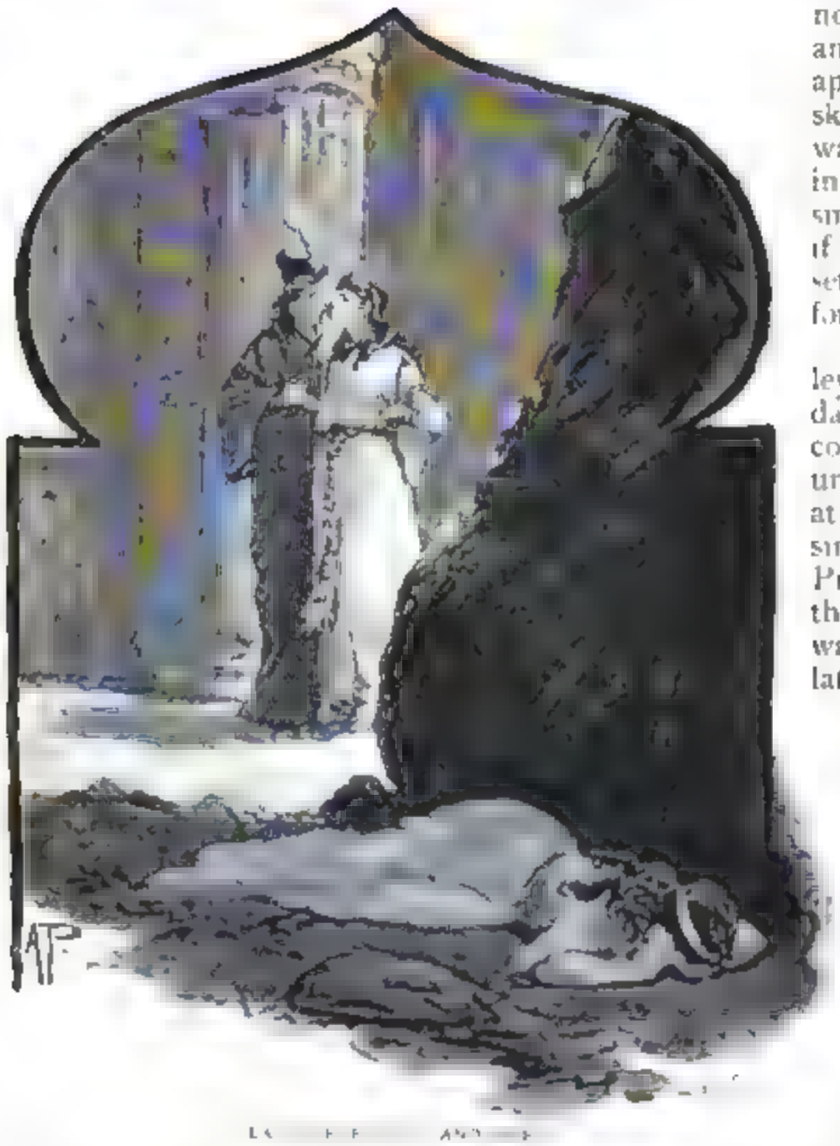
"At first I could not believe it, then I began to wander at nightfall alone; and once, when I ventured into this valley of jasper, I saw two lovers come forth from yonder archway. They talked and laughed together, and the maiden leant her head upon the shoulder of the man at her side. I crept close to them, hidden by the shadow of yonder wall.

"The maiden had come from Eastern lands, and, by the rich pearls of mystic hue which she wore, I knew that this must be the queen whom I had seen once before. At first the man's face was partly hidden from me, but he raised it, and, gazing into his companion's eyes, their lips met in a lover's kiss; but I, wretched beyond measure, fell prostrate in the friendly shadow, for in that moment I recognised Prince Kasmir, and I knew that the rumour was true, and that my lover was lost to me for ever!

"I lay there, still and silent, until the two passed through the archway once more; then I went slowly back to the tent, dejected and alone.

"In the tribe of the Hilyats there dwelt one who was famous for charms of great potency, and to him I went and told, with many a sigh, that my lover was false. He was kind to me, and promised aid. When I went to him again he said that the stars had agreed to help me to regain the Prince's affection.

"By his commands I made a fire of



glowing embers upon this spot, such as the one ye now see, and waited for the coming of night. Sitting beside it, I was told to watch the lovers, and, when they passed into the jasper vale, to blow the embers, that they might glow redder still, as the charm which was given me was mingled with them. Then should my lover be restored to me, and the queen who had stolen his love should perish. So said the great magician.

"When the stars came out I heard the sound of voices, as before; then the lovers appeared from under the archway. I placed the charm upon the embers, and, fanning them with my breath, next looked up at the great star which shone brighter than the others, and begged it to be pitiful and to restore to me my beloved.

"As I did so, a sudden light appeared above, for the star burst and fell upon the lovers! I hastened forward, for the magician had told me that the Prince would be uninjured. Alas! when I reached the spot nothing was there, for the Prince and his adored one had disappeared. I looked up to the sky once more, but the great star was no longer to be seen; while in its place were two others, smaller, but shining together, as if the twain had become stars set in the blue heaven to abide for ever side by side.

"I ran shrieking from the valley, and wandered aimlessly for days on the mountain slopes. I could not die, and now my spirit urges me ever to visit this valley at nightfall. Years have passed since then; the palace of the Prince has disappeared, but amid the ruins of this jasper vale I wander sadly, or climb the desolate mountain peaks.

"When the great star which ye see above appears, I kindle a fire, as I did of old, for then do I see the star fall again and the lovers perish. The magician deceived me, for he hated the Prince, and used me as the means of destroying him."

III.

THROUGHOUT the narrative neither of us had interrupted; on its conclusion I glanced uneasily at my companion.

"What do you think about this star?" I whispered. For reply, Denviers pointed towards the woman, who had partly raised herself, and was engaged in endeavouring to make the embers glow brighter. After remaining silent for some minutes before answering my question, Denviers at last said—

"If there is any truth in what we have been told, I think the proof of it will soon be forthcoming."

"The woman seems to be strangely moved," I continued; "would it not be better for us to move away to the spot from where we watched her as she kindled the fire?" To this question Denviers assented, and we took up a position from which we could observe clearly whatever happened in the valley.

"Do you think she is mad?" I asked. Then, without waiting for my companion to answer, I grasped his arm firmly to enjoin silence.

He glanced in the direction in which he

saw I was eagerly looking, and which was towards the jasper gateway.

A thin film of mist seemed to me to have arisen, and in the midst of it the face of a woman apparently arose. Clearer and more distinct it seemed to become, and then the form of the Queen appeared clad in a flowing robe, and adorned with strings of pearls about her neck and arms, while upon her head there glittered a diamond tiara.

As the star above her seemed to shine still brighter, a man, tall and majestic, was to be seen at her side, and the lovers were bathed in a silvery light that streamed down upon them.

"Frank!" I whispered, in an awestruck tone, "are they living beings upon whom we gaze, or are they spirits risen from the dead?"

"Hush, Harold!" he answered, quietly, "your sight must be keener than mine, for at present I see nothing there."

The woman by the embers rose, the calm expression vanished from her countenance, and she staggered forward with outstretched arms. We watched the scene intently. When she reached the jasper gate, she flung herself wildly on her knees, as she exclaimed—

"Kasmir, my beloved one, once again art thou come from the sleeping shades that my eyes may rest upon thee, and that I may lament the love which all unknowingly destroyed thee."

The man seemed to turn coldly from her, then bent forward, and glanced passionately into the eyes of the form at his side.

The star above seemed for a moment to cleave the sky, then, bursting into myriads, fell in a shower like a silver sea, and enveloped what appeared to me to be the forms of the lovers and the woman kneeling vainly at their feet!

Almost immediately the vale assumed its former appearance, and we rushed forward, but found only the woman, to whose story we had listened, kneeling with clasped hands and that look of infinite sorrow upon her face which we had seen before.

Our presence roused her, for she instantaneously started up, and, darting through the portal of the jasper gate, disappeared. We followed her at a headlong pace, and, after traversing the ruins of a stately palace, saw her flying in the distance before us at an almost incredible pace. At last we stopped, exhausted with our vain efforts to overtake her, and saw her mounting a fantastic ridge that stood out rugged and desolate against the starlit sky. Then she disappeared, and nothing remained to us but the recollection of her dreamy yet troubled face!

As we rested, before proceeding to attempt to find a way which might lead to where Hassan had encamped, I asked Denviers again whether he thought the forms which I had seen were real. To my surprise he declared that nothing had passed before his eyes save the woman to whom he had spoken.

"But," I persisted, "I saw them distinctly."

He smiled as he answered—

"No doubt you did, in imagination, Harold. The fact is the woman's story was so impressed upon your mind that, when you looked towards the

"SHE FLUNG HERSELF ON HER KNEES

jasper arch, you expected to see such a vision —"

"And the falling star," I interrupted, "was that imaginary, too?"

He turned towards me as he responded:

"No, you saw something then. What the true story of the cause of this woman's insanity may be, we are not likely to learn, but the explanation of the falling star, or rather shower of stars, is simple enough. On certain known days in each year the earth crosses the orbit of a stream of meteorites above here. When this occurs a shower of falling stars may be seen, and the woman has accustomed herself to connect a purely natural event with the highly imaginative reappearance of her lover. However, we have had a strange adventure. I hope we shall soon find our way out of this valley."

"KNEELING WITH CLASPED HANDS."

And, rising, we resumed our journey, and before long fortunately reached the spot where Hassan was encamped.

"Will the Englishmen forgive me?" he asked. "I could not speak to them of the one who, in a jealous moment, despoiled one kingdom of its prince and another of the queen who reigned over it."

We made a suitable reply, and, entering the tent, worn out with the events of the night, sought repose amid the words of Hassan, in which he declared himself the dust of our feet, and expressed his determination to ask the felicities to abide with us for so readily forgiving him.

Shafts from an Eastern Quiver.

III. THE BLACK HORSEMEN OF NISHA, THE SEER.

By Charles J. Mansford, B.A.

I.

"IT looks as if the grass had been set on fire," responded Denviers, in answer to a remark of mine, when I called his attention to a long, parched tract which formed a striking contrast to the rich verdure around it.

"Very likely that is the reason," I assented; "still, it seems strange that the rest of it should have escaped."

"The Englishman speaks truth," interposed Hassan, "the cause of what we see is far stranger indeed than those who have not travelled hither before would be inclined to suppose."

"I have not the slightest doubt but what Hassan has some mysterious and wholly imaginary explanation of it to offer," said Denviers to me in a low tone, then turning to the Arab, he asked:—

"Well, Hassan, can you enlighten us on the matter? What do the people of Khorassan conjecture about it?"

"It is no idle rumour, sahib, which is told concerning this scorched tract," answered our guide, "for they who have been the cause of it are surely the scourges of the plain through which we are passing, for tears and lamentation in despoiled households do they leave behind them, in obedience to the commands of Nisha, the Seer. But you are wearied with the long journey through the desert of sand and need the repose which the tent affords. At some other time I will explain the cause of this strange tract, even when we are safe in the lovely city of Meshed, or wander amid the plashing fountains and clustering roses of Nishapoor."

"Which is another way of saying that you prefer to tell us the cause when we shall be unable to test its truth, I suppose," interposed Denviers. The Arab shook his head gravely in sign of dissent.

"Allah forbid!" he exclaimed. "If you think that is my motive you wrong me indeed, since my only desire is to keep you from the danger which falls upon those who follow the black horsemen; for the parched tract which you see here, just where the desert gives place to the emerald verdure, has been made by the trampling of the hoofs of Nisha's phantom horses."

"Then, Hassan," said Denviers, quietly, "I think we will pitch our tent yonder," and he pointed to where a grove of majestic walnut trees stood out against the grey sky; "the night is fast closing in upon us, and I suppose that spectres, even in Persia, wander abroad in the still small hours, much as they do in other countries."

"I THINK WE WILL PITCH OUR TENT YONDER."

"Jest not, sahib," said Hassan, in the grave tone which he usually assumed when moved by the recollection of some Eastern tradition; "if you care to hear the story I will narrate it to you, but, by the beard of the Prophet, blame not Hassan if evil befall the English-

men afterwards, for it is a true saying in the land of Khorassan that by his horsemen the Seer has lured many a brave man on to destruction."

"Pitch the tent, Hassan," said Denviers, impatiently, and as he spoke he dismounted from his steed and led it by the bridle towards the spot which he had pointed out to the Arab. A few minutes were sufficient for our horses to be securely hobbled, and as they leisurely cropped the grass before the front of the tent, we assumed a recumbent position while Hassan began his improbable story.

"In the days when the Nasranee were the ruling people of Persia," said the Arab, "Nisha, the Seer, was a mighty power in the land ruled by On, the descendant of the Sun. He it was who discovered a secret potion by which he gave renewed life to On. So much did the monarch honour Nisha that the latter's name became famous through all the spreading lands, which extended from fair Chaldea to the silvery islands that float like crystal stars in the Eastern seas, wherein even now the descendants of the Shintos dwell."

"But these horses, Hassan," interposed Denviers, "what had On to do with them?"

"Patience, sahib," responded Hassan. "To Nisha, the Seer, came many wise men of the East, sent by the monarchs who ruled the lands far and near, for they feared On and would fain drink of this potion. But Nisha, faithful to On, loyally kept the secret, and was rewarded by the favours of his royal master.

"To On were born many sons, none of whom could hope to obtain sway over the land, since their parent was apparently rendered immortal. Among them was one who was proud and scornful, and wished to possess his father's throne, so he sought, but in vain, to win Nisha over to his cause. He knew that once each year the Seer prepared the potion in a crystal goblet, and that when the exact hour arrived On drank of it, and so there was added another year to his span of life. It fretted the son's proud heart to think that one day he would lie cold and passionless in the tomb while his father should still live on and reign over the land where diamonds and emeralds are the gems which adorn a sceptre.

"About him this son gathered a great following of youths as reckless and impetuous as himself, and together they formed a plot by which their leader might obtain the throne which he coveted. When the stated day arrived, On sought the abode of the Seer, and entered the tower wherefrom the stars could be seen, and where Nisha nightly increased his lore. As the monarch passed up the winding stairway a sound smote upon his ears. He halted for a moment and looked uneasily around, but nothing could be seen, for the alarmed conspirators hastily hid themselves behind the projecting angle of a mighty pillar. As soon as On had thrown himself upon some cushions to rest in the star-lit chamber of the Seer until the appointed moment came when he was to drink the potion, the youths stole softly behind the heavy tapestry, and noiselessly making slits in it with the points of their daggers, watched the monarch and his subject. Nisha gazed at the stars in silence for hours, then at last he moved to a strangely-carved idol, and touching it, a hollow was revealed from which he drew forth the crystal goblet. Pouring into it a colourless fluid, he next threw into it what appeared to be a ruby, and as a faint sweet fragrance, like that of a blossoming almond vale, seemed to perfume the apartment, he placed the goblet in the hand which the monarch eagerly extended to grasp it.

"The draught was at the lips of On when out sprang those who had been concealed by the hangings. In a moment the crystal goblet was dashed violently from the monarch's hand, and, falling to the ground, shivered into a thousand pieces! Among the conspirators, the frenzied On seemed to rest his eyes upon one alone—his own son! With a wild cry of anguish he covered his face with his hands and fell dead upon the marble floor! So the son of On obtained the throne and tried to make the Seer his friend, but the latter resolutely shunned the advances of the haughty ruler, and shut himself up in the tomb of On, into which few indeed dared to follow him. At last this monarch in turn grew old, and determined to wrest the secret from Nisha, but upon the band of horsemen sent to capture him and to carry him a prisoner to the monarch's palace, Nisha laid a potent spell which bound them motionless until the time when he had need of them. Thus the son perished when old age seized him, Nisha living to enjoy the tidings of the monarch's death. Then, it is said, he began to take vengeance upon the people who had supported the hated one's cause, for he had heard that they said On had lived so long that he grew hateful to them, and their changeful hearts longed for a new ruler. Through all the years which have

"WITH A WILD CRY OF ANGUISH HE COVERED HIS FACE WITH HIS HANDS."

passed Nisha still has lived, and his vengeance is not yet complete. The wayfarers who cross these plains at night have indeed had reason to lament the terrible crime of the son of On and the exaction of its requitement. Upon them suddenly steals a band of horsemen who snatch up the incautious wanderers and bear them away shrieking at their doom, for they are rarely again seen alive by mortal men. The people of Khorassan declare that they are gathered round the dead body of On in an enchanted crowd, and hold up their living yet lifeless hands in vain supplication to Nisha, who stalks among them a strange semblance of humanity. Distorted with age, his long, shrivelled arms reach to his feet as he holds the captives motionless with the glare of his red, bird-like eyes."

"A most interesting story, Hassan," said Denviers, when the Arab had finished; "and you really believe that Nisha has lived since the time when the Chaldeans studied the stars from the top of Babel's uncompleted tower?" and he whistled irreverently.

"The mind of man is a well unfathomed, none know its depths," responded Hassan. "If Allah and the Prophet will it so, why should not Nisha become immortal?"

"Well, Hassan," I interposed, "I must confess that I should like to see both the horsemen and the tomb before accepting your story as true."

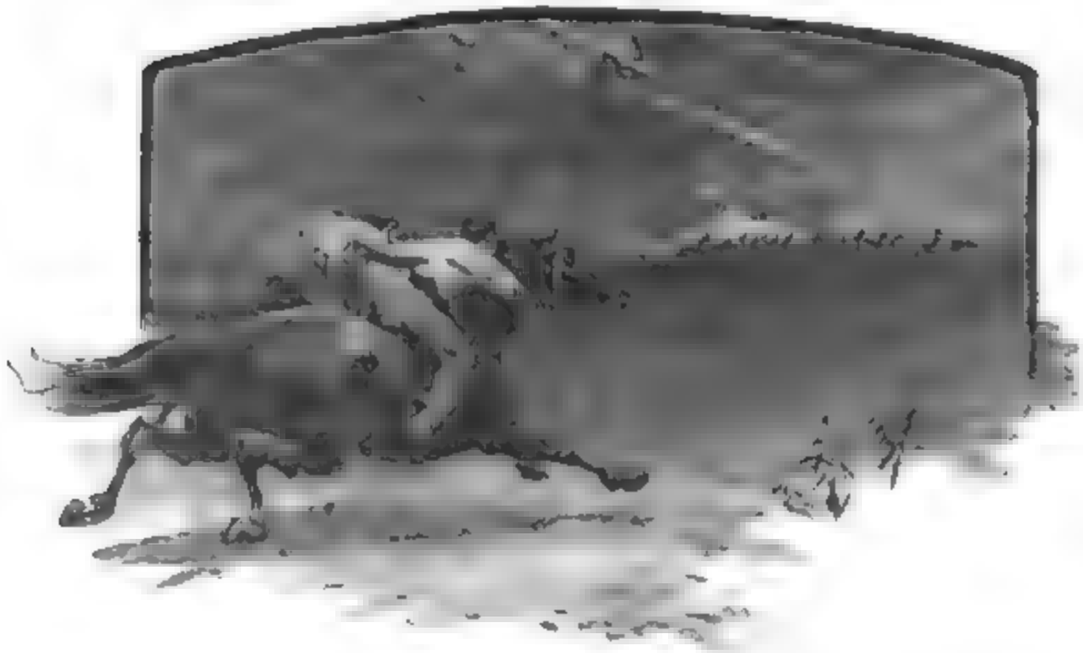
The Arab looked gravely at us as we reclined upon the cushions of our tents.

"Rest now," he answered, "and your guide will watch at the door of the tent. If the band of riders should chance to-night to cross the path yonder, I will surely awake you that your eyes may rest upon them."

II.

Worn out with the days of long, dreary riding which we had endured in our journey from Demavend to Khorassan, we had sunk into a profound sleep, when Hassan entered the tent and hastily aroused us.

"See for yourselves, sahibs!" he exclaimed, "the band is returning to Nisha, and bearing away some shrieking captive!" We sprang to the door of the tent and looked out. The sky was growing overcast with clouds, through which at fitful intervals the light of the moon struggled and lit up the scene around. A breeze sprang up for a few minutes, and as the clouds scudded before it, there was revealed to us a strange spectacle.



"THEY FLEW ALONG LIKE THE WIND."

A band of scantily-attired horsemen bestrode about twenty black steeds, while across the front of one of their number was thrown the writhing body of a man whose cries were expressive of the utmost terror. As the horsemen moved at a somewhat swift pace, we noticed that a sound was made by the hoofs of the horses, although their riders sat in their saddles as motionless as the dead. One strange circumstance was noticeable, which was that the horsemen were apparently of a different race to the man whom they were carrying off; indeed, they resembled the natives of Africa in colour so far as we could make out when the moonlight streamed down upon them.

"Hassan is certainly mistaken in supposing that these horsemen are spectres, or their steeds either," said Denviers, "the hoofs of the horses make too much noise for us to accept that theory." Then, turning to the Arab, he exclaimed:—

"The horses, Hassan, quick! for your life!" It took scarcely a minute to unhobble them and for Denviers and I to mount our sturdy Afghans, yet the distance between us and the retreating band had increased considerably. Without waiting for saddles we flung ourselves upon the animals and set off at a breakneck speed. The black horsemen soon appeared to become aware of our pursuit of them, for they quickened their pace considerably, and as they did so the captive, hearing the heavy thud of our horses' hoofs striking the ground behind, redoubled his struggles and cries for help.

On we went, faster and still faster! Flinging the reins from our hands, we leant forward and clasped the necks of our horses, as they flew along like the wind. The clouds above us grew more compact and lowering, and for a few minutes the only guide which led us on in our mad career was the mournful, appealing cry which came from the captive.

"How much longer can we keep up such a pace as this?" I gasped out, as Denviers seemed to be leading a little, while my own steed was beginning to show signs of exhaustion.

"Can't say," he answered laconically, "we started to save this man, and the horses can have no respite till that is accomplished." His words inspired me with new confidence, and I urged on my horse with all the expressions which I had heard Hassan use when coaxing it. The rumble of thunder, followed by a few very heavy drops of rain, convinced us both that to our other perils would be added the discomfort of riding half clothed and with our heads uncovered through a storm the severity of which, at that time of the year, we knew from experience would be considerable, although it would possibly be of short duration. The rain now began to descend in torrents, the effect upon our horses being happily to refresh their flagging energies, for they seemed to dash onward faster than ever The man's cries were borne louder upon our ears, and we knew that we were drawing nearer to him, so that the prospect of rescuing him seemed to us more hopeful.

Suddenly the storm broke. From across the mountain peaks darted a vivid flash of lightning, followed instantaneously by a terrific peal of thunder, which made our frightened horses gallop forward entirely beyond our control. On we went, till suddenly, to our horror, another blinding flash revealed that before us was a chasm stretching as far as the eye could reach.

With all our might we struggled to restrain the horses, but in vain. Over the side of the chasm apparently those whom we were pursuing went; there was another wild shriek from the captive, and the next moment our horses, recognising the danger when too late, reared almost perpendicularly, then fell headlong down the abyss!

I closed my eyes and felt a strange choking in my throat as we went sheer down, and the horse quivered in terror beneath me. A sensation of drowning appeared to ensue, then the air seemed to fan my cheeks, and wonderingly I opened my eyes again and looked around for my companion. We had fallen into a deep ravine, through which swept a wide mountain torrent, and the horses were now swimming rapidly with the fierce current.

"What an escape!" I called out to Denviers, as I saw him still clinging to his horse.

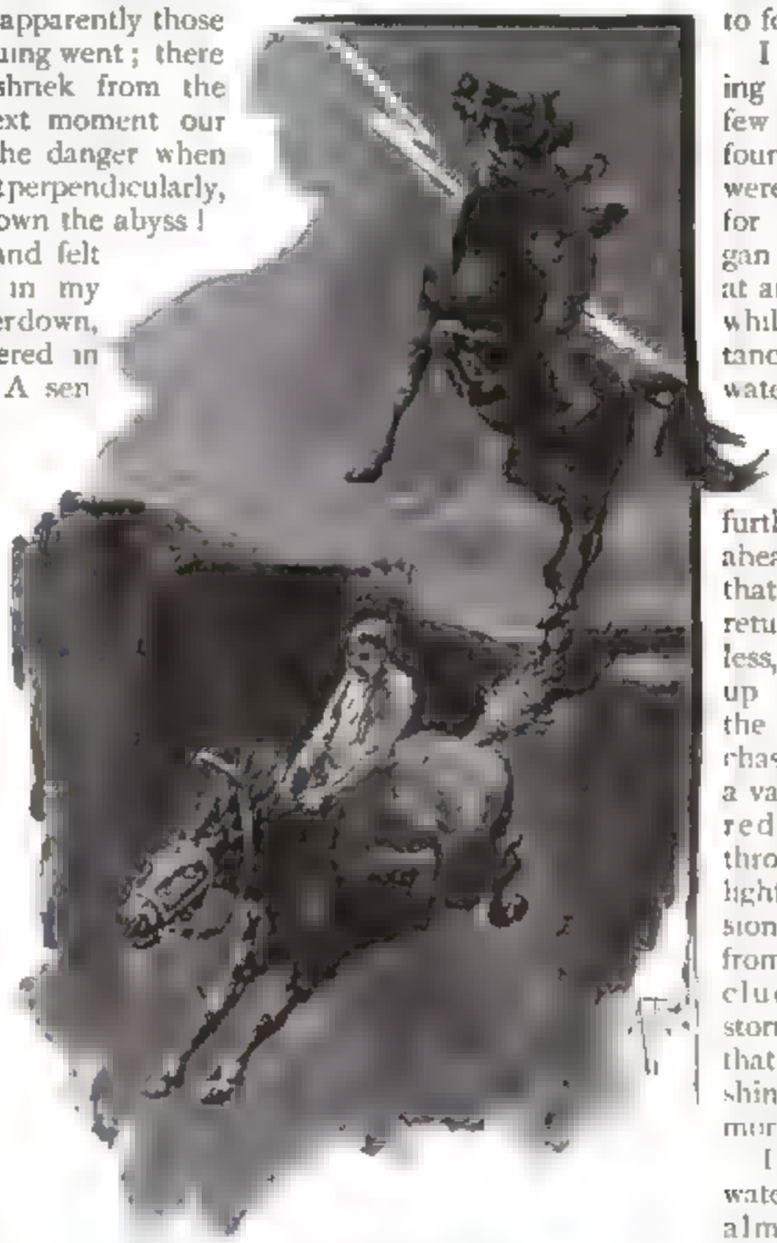
"I don't know that we have much to be elated about," he answered, "the sides of the ravine are almost perpendicular, apparently; to climb them is impossible, and it is quite likely that the current may bear us away into some greater danger."

Again the cry of the peasant sounded upon our ears—this time beyond the seething waters.

"Keep with the stream," Denviers exclaimed, "He has evidently been carried down that way. After such an effort as this we shall surely rescue him!"

"Don't you think that this torrent is becoming more rapid?" I asked, as my horse breasted the waters and carried me close to Denvier's side. He looked at the current steadily, then replied:—

"I am inclined to think that it is; watch carefully, and, if you see anything to cling to, make for it, and I will turn my horse's head that way and try to follow you."



"HEADLONG DOWN THE ABYSS."

I was now leading the way by a few yards, and soon found that my fears were well grounded, for the stream began to sweep along at an alarming rate, while in the distance a roar as of waters confined to narrow limits seemed to indicate that further danger lay ahead. We knew that an attempt to return would be useless, and on looking up observed that the sides of the chasm now met in a vaulted roof of a reddish colour, through which a light seemed occasionally to steal, from which we concluded that the storm was over, and that the moon was shining forth once more.

The noise of the waters now became almost deafening, and we could descry that ahead of us was a narrow passage scarcely large enough for a man to pass through, for rocks seemed to rise like buttresses on either side of it. I pointed to the narrow defile, and asked my companion:—

"Do you think that we can get through that on horseback?"

"I am afraid not," he answered, "and, considering the splendid way in which our

horses have behaved, I think we ought to give them an equal chance with ourselves." As he spoke, Denviers unclasped his arms, which had hitherto been round his horse's neck, and a moment afterwards was swimming with a grand stroke amid the waters. I raised myself from my own horse, and, plunging into the stream, followed my companion, who was within a few yards of the rocks on either side.

"Grasp the buttress on the left," he called out to me; "I will hold on to the other." I drew a deep breath, and waited for the torrent to hurl me forward. One slip, and I knew that a moment afterwards my body would be sucked into the seething gulf in front, and then all would be over. My hands clasped the buttress firmly, and, steadying myself for a moment, I drew my body slowly out of the water. When I had climbed up hand over hand in this way for several yards, I saw Denviers was already leaning over from what appeared to me to be a huge stone lattice. He stretched out his hands, and, seizing me, dragged me half senseless and exhausted behind it. Resting there until the strain of the efforts which I had made seemed to become less oppressive, I began to observe, in the dim light, the shape of the bases of the pillar which rose from the stone platform on which we were. I traced out the representations of two gigantic feet, just as Denviers looked upwards and exclaimed suddenly:—

"Look at the shape of this support, which reaches to the arched top of the chasm! Surely it is some monstrous idol!" We drew close to the lattice work and, standing with our backs to the latter, found ourselves facing an enormous idol, which we subsequently discovered was the grim guardian of one of the entrances to the tomb of On.

Its repulsive-looking head, adorned with enormous ears, was of a type similar to that of the Nubian race, and was bare of covering. Across its swarthy breast passed a carved band which interlaced a garment bound at the waist by a belt which supported the representation of a loosely-hanging garb reaching to the knees. In one of its giant hands it held a curved sword, while the other was raised to grasp a serpent which twisted in mazy coils about the idol's body.

"The entrance to the tomb of On, without doubt," said Denviers. "I wonder if we shall ever get out of it again!" We moved past the enormous image and found ourselves facing a massive stone door, which yielded readily as we pressed upon it, and then a moment afterwards we saw before us a wonderful natural hollow apparently in the heart of the mountain, for we were in the tomb of On!

III.

JAGGED and red, from the sides and roof of this gigantic tomb huge boulders protruded, while, lying stretched upon a low bier, was the body of the dead On, apparently embalmed, and conspicuous among the others round it by its length; for the dead king must have been much beyond the stature of the present race of men. A look of infinite despair was upon his face; the hands of the monarch were joined upon his breast, while in them was clasped the handle of a massive sword, the blade of which rested upon his silent form. Peering cautiously out from the position which we had taken behind one of the many boulders which strewed the floor at intervals, we soon discovered the real use to which the tomb was put. Close beside the entrance through which we had come was another, through which the moonlight streamed into the tomb, and apparently led in a direction the same as the ravine into which we had leapt. From this we conjectured that, had we ridden a little further up, we might have succeeded in turning our horses' heads into the entrance of it, and so have avoided the peril in which we had been placed. The man's cry had not come to us from in front, as we had thought when breasting the waters, but from this second entry to the tomb. Looking down the entrance we saw several of the horses behind which we had ridden haltered by a rope to some projecting fastenings in the rocky wall.

The tomb itself was no mere charnel house despite the many bodies which we saw ranging through it. By the side of the dead On we observed the form of one who must have died of extreme age, and from the description which Hassan had given us, we judged that this was the body of the Seer whom the credulous people of Khorassan believed to be still alive.

The real ruler of the tomb was a negro much like the riders whom we had seen and tracked over the plain. From the throng of men which surrounded him and were evidently narrating the capture of the victim who stood among them, we easily distinguished this leader from the abundance of the jewellery which he wore. His limbs were scantily clothed, but his arms and ankles were heavily bound with bracelets, while round his thickly matted hair where it reached his retreating

forehead was a single hoop of gold, in the centre of which a jewel was set, and which heightened with its flashing light the contrast between its white brilliancy and the intense black colour of the wearer's face.

"Let us get closer to them" whispered Denviers, "and try to learn what the fate of the captive is intended to be." We moved nearer to them, cautiously hiding behind another boulder.

"At present we are unobserved," I began, "and the men evidently find too much pleasure in taunting their captive to set a watch upon the tomb." As if the hideous negro wished to contradict my words, a shrill scream of laughter rang through the tomb; then a voice exclaimed:—

"Come nearer, thou enemy of On, the mighty one, come, that thou mayest join in the number that are doomed to appease his Great Shade." We saw the captive fling himself wildly at the feet of this strange being as he cried:

"Spare me, and I will worship at the tomb of On until the sands of my life are run out!" The negro uttered an appalling laugh of derision as he answered:—

"Art thou not of the plain of Khorassan, over which pass many whose wealth makes the eyes of my slaves glad when they look upon it?"

"Frank," I whispered, "this is a band of marauders who have migrated to this tomb, and who rob the people around with impunity because the credulous people think they are not mortals."

"Exactly what I thought when Hassan told us about them, but listen to the questions which they are putting to this captive," he replied. We ceased our conversation and heard the captured one reply:

"I swear by the Koran I am poor; I could not pay one-tenth of such a sum!"

"Then there is for thee no escape," answered the black ruler, "surely thou shalt die!" He made some movement with his hand, in response to which the men around attempted to seize their captive. The latter turned and made a sudden attempt to escape. He had darted past the boulder behind which we had hidden, when the foremost of the slaves reached him. Just as he did so Denviers wrenched the sword from the hands of the dead On, near to which we had stealthily crept, and thrust himself between the captive and his pursuers.

"Back!" he cried, "lay but a hand upon him and all the magic of the East shall not save the one who does so from the fate which he deserves."

The men stopped for a moment, astonished at our sudden appearance, and then, as we heard the captive retreating down the tomb to the second entrance, we turned and followed him. In a moment we had flung ourselves each upon one of the horses that stood there, and slashed hastily through the halters which held them, and then, as the captive led the way, we dashed wildly through the ravine closely followed by some of the horsemen. It was a race for life that we long afterwards remembered, but, as we urged on our horses, we found that our pursuers were dropping behind, and looking back we saw them in a discomfited crowd watching us with surprise as we galloped over the plain after passing through the ravine. We stopped at last, and while the captive insisted on riding home on the horse which he had so strangely acquired, we dismounted, and turning the animals in the direction whence they had come, saw them rush riderless back towards the tomb.

The peasant, poor fellow, was full of gratitude to us for rescuing him, and called on Allah to reward us. We parted with him some

distance after we emerged upon a green and level plain, and having scanned it narrowly, my companion pointed towards the East, exclaiming as he did so :—

"If I am not mistaken, Harold, yonder are the trees under which we pitched our tent.'

I looked in the direction indicated and saw the majestic grove of walnut trees which we had left when we set out to follow the black horsemen. Hassan, who was within the tent, came out as he heard footsteps approaching :—

"The Sahibs have lost their horses?" he said, in his grave inquiring tone, "and have been absent from the tent for many hours, which brought much anxiety to their faithful slave."

"BACK!" MR CHIRD.

"Well, Hassan, as that is the case," said Denviers lightly, "you will have the pleasure of purchasing two more for us."

"The lightest word of the Sahib is as a law unto Hassan," responded the Arab.

"No doubt!" said Denviers, then turning to me he added :—

"And I dare-say he will make a tolerably good bargain, for our faithful guide doesn't usually forget himself on such occasions!"

Indeed, the amount of backsheesh which our grave Arab levied before the day was over from a village horsedealer of Sultanabad was a convincing testimony to the truth of Frank's remark.

Shafts from an Eastern Quiver.

IV.—DARAK, THE SCORN OF THE AFGHANS.

By Charles J. Mansford, B.A.

I.

"It seems to be making for our tent, Frank," I exclaimed to Denviers, as we stood gazing over the waste of sand which lay between us and the town of Ghuzni, which towered before us on a rock three hundred feet above the surrounding plain.

"The fellow runs magnificently," answered my companion, in a tone of admiration; "but for all that I am inclined to think his efforts are being made in vain. Look at that Afghan behind him; he is almost within striking distance of the fugitive!"

Fleeing across the plain was a man whose aquiline nose, intense black eyes, and swarthy complexion disclosed the characteristics of the Hebrew race from which the crowd of Afghans, who hotly pursued him, claimed their descent. On they came, rushing like a horde of barbarians, while they wildly flourished their sabres and daggers, or whatever weapons they had been able to hastily snatch up.

"FLEEING ACROSS THE PLAIN"

The man's body, although slender, was well proportioned, and in spite of the evident danger in which he was in I could not help noticing as he gradually neared us the picturesque effect of the garb which he wore. Round his loins was passed a many-coloured scarf, which drew close to his form an embroidered garment which formed a loose covering for the upper part of his body, leaving his bronzed chest partly exposed, and then hung down covering him as far as the knees. A sash, made of the same material as the scarf, bound his head like a turban, the end of it fluttering behind him, its hue contrasting forcibly with the Afghan's heavy eyebrows and black beard. By his side hung a curved scimitar, shaped like that which Persians usually wear, but which he made no attempt to use, for, against the fierce howling mob which followed him, he knew that it would be worse than useless for him to endeavour to make a stand.

"Hassan!" shouted Denviers to our guide, who was within the tent preparing some food for us, "what is the cause of this?"

The Arab came to where we were standing, and after watching the strange spectacle for a moment, he replied :—

"I can scarcely tell, sahib, unless he belongs to a different tribe to those pursuing him ; if he is fleeing for shelter to the tent, the Englishmen will have good need of stout hearts during the next few minutes. Cowardly and treacherous as are those who follow him, in the frenzy of their fanaticism they will face the utmost perils unflinchingly once they are thoroughly aroused."

Denviers turned to the Arab, and said in the quiet tone which he invariably adopted when danger confronted him :—

"Bring out our rifles, Hassan." The Arab obeyed, and, as we took the weapons from him, he ventured to utter a few words of caution, which sounded strangely upon our ears :—

"Save the man, sahibs, if you can ; but if possible avoid injuring one of the tribe of the Saduzai, for such indeed they are. The eyes of Hassan are keen, and see the flashing glances of dislike which are daily turned upon the Englishmen as they traverse this country. There is a tradition, indeed, that between Afghan and Feringhee one day war to the death will be proclaimed, when the former ally themselves with the white bear of the frozen north, which seeks to hug to its shaggy breast the border town which is the key to the golden plain of the sacred Ganges. To slay the Englishmen would be deemed by them a deed of glory, and their women's dark eyes would light up with a fierce joy when they returned home with the captured English sabres adorning Saduzai sashes !"

Yet, in spite of his vague words, Hassan prepared himself to help us if necessary, for on glancing into the tent for a moment, I saw him carefully feeling the keen edge of the weapon which he usually carried.

"Darak, the scapegoat !" "Darak, the nation's scorn !" "Death to Darak !" were some of the cries which we distinguished from the babel of sounds which arose from the lips of those who were following the fugitive. He was now within thirty yards of the tent, and we stepped forward and excitedly cheered him on.

"Refuge !" was the one solitary and appealing cry which burst from his lips as he ran towards us at a tremendous speed before the horde, which seemed fully bent on his destruction. When he was only a few yards distant from us, Denviers raised his rifle to his shoulder, and, taking steady aim, covered the foremost of the pursuers, while the fugitive darted past us, and, with an inarticulate cry, threw himself, utterly exhausted, upon the cushions of the tent. The howling mob halted and held a hurried conference for a moment, then one of them attempted to advance, as if for the purpose of holding a conversation with us. Denviers was however resolute ; he knew too well the treacherous character of the race, and feared lest, in an unguarded moment, the Afghan's sword might be stealthily thrust into the man whom we had for the present saved from his foes. He raised his rifle again to his shoulder—a silent message which the man rightly understood ; for, after a further discussion with the others, they all uttered a wild cry of baffled rage and ran swiftly back towards Ghuzni to rouse, as we conjectured, its inhabitants to join them in an attack upon us.

"THE FUGITIVE DARTED PAST US."

"We shall have some sort of a respite," said Denviers, as we entered the tent ; "but I expect that the fugitive will bring us into conflict with these Afghans. It will be best

for us to change our position as soon as possible—it is too unprotected at present." The man lying upon the cushions now dragged his weary body to our feet as he faltered out, brokenly :—

"Allah reward the Englishmen, for Darak, the outcast, can never do so." Hassan attended to his wants, and when the fugitive had recovered himself somewhat we endeavoured to learn from him the cause of his seeking refuge with us. It was some time, however, before we could understand him at all, for he spoke a kind of hybrid Pushto, a language of which we had little knowledge. Hassan, however, acted as interpreter, and through him we learnt that the man had ventured into Ghuzni in spite of the fact that he had been prohibited from entering an Afghan town, and thus he had aroused the fierce fanaticism of his nation. He had seen our tent from the overhanging town, and had fled to us, this being his sole opportunity of escaping his foes.

After passing through the plain of Khorassan, where we had met with our strange experience in the tomb of On, we spent several days both at Meshed and Nishapoor; for we found that these beautiful Persian cities had not been over-estimated by our somewhat imaginative guide. Thence, after a long journey, we had passed into Afghanistan, and having stayed for some time at Herat, a city which interested us considerably, we journeyed along the beautiful river valley almost as far as Kabul; then turning southward, found ourselves encamped outside Ghuzni, where our present adventure was taking place.

Hassan, who knew the district well, suggested that we should strike the tent and climb the mountain which rose to our left, as it seemed probable that we could defend ourselves there, if pursued. This, too, was Denviers' opinion, before expressed, while the Afghan added some words in support of it, and accordingly we did so. After we had journeyed up the slope of the mountain for a considerable time, the Afghan led the way, and conducted us by a narrow path which wound between two mountains. At last we halted, and, feeling that we were now secure, Denviers summoned Hassan to his side and bade him endeavour to get the Afghan to narrate to us the reason of his exiled fate.

The man was at first disinclined to do so, but eventually gave way, and, sheltering ourselves under a projecting rock from the rays of the sun, we listened to his narrative, which Hassan turned into his own mode of expression as he interpreted it. From time to time we looked wonderingly at him, especially as he neared the conclusion of the story, for so strange it seemed to us that we more than once thought Hassan was embellishing it with some ideas of his own.

Our Arab guide, however, seemed to be surprised himself as the story proceeded, and occasionally interrupted the Afghan to ask some searching question, which always appeared to us to be answered satisfactorily, to judge from Hassan's countenance. Forbidden to hold intercourse with any of his own nation, the Afghan eventually seemed glad of the opportunity to converse with Hassan, for there was much in common between them, since both the Afghan and the Arab were Sunnees, and felt the influence of the common bond which united them.

The contrast between the grave, mild features of our guide and the fierce look upon the face of the Afghan, which all the dangers through which he had passed could not subdue, seemed to add to the effectiveness of the scene before us, and, watching them as they sat opposite to each other, I felt almost sorry when the narrative was concluded. Hassan, as well as he could, made the account continuous, while Denviers and I, reclining in the little group which the party unitedly made, listened to the following interpretation.

II.

'WITHIN yonder city of Ghuzni stands a palace, the roof whereof is beaten gold; and, inlaid with many a gem, pillars of ivory support it. Upon its walls are engraven the deeds of the mighty Mahmaud, what time he overthrew the haughty monarch upon whose banners were emblazoned the Lion and the Sun. Before its sculptured porticoes fountains throw high their crystal waters, and cool the burning winds that blow over the parched lands which lie beyond the Helmund and the shimmering waters of Istada.

"Yet I, Darak, prince of this palace and its treasures, was unhappy, since never for me had love shone in the eyes of an Afghan maiden, and, save for the countless slaves who came obedient to my call, my home was desolate. So, leaving it in charge of one of the Saduzai race, I set forth to visit strange lands and to find a bride fitting to share with me the inheritance which had come to me through the long line from which I sprang.

"Wandering in Eastern lands I came at last to Egypt, and even to Cairo, the city of mosques and minarets, for my eyes would fain behold the spot where the sacred head

"IN THE STREETS OF CAIRO."

of Hoseyn was buried—he who was descended from the great Prophet. Then arose a rumour within the city that a prince had come to honour it, and, at times in the streets of Cairo, I saw the veil of an Egyptian maiden slightly moved aside that her eyes might rest upon the jewels of the sword which I wore. I had heard that the women were like the black-eyed virgins of Paradise, and it seemed to me that the saying was true. I became enchanted with this maiden, and watched many a weary hour that one glance from her liquid orbs might be to me a reward for the long journey which I had taken.

"I ventured to follow her through the narrow streets, and my eyes rested upon the abode wherein she dwelt, and, as I gazed up at the lattice-work above the corbels, it seemed to me that behind it the maiden lingered. Each day she wandered forth, and our eyes spoke the love which we dared not utter, lest it might bring death unto her. One memorable day she came not forth, and on the morrow, too, I missed her glances. I was in despair, and wandered aimlessly through the city, wondering what fate had overtaken her. Then there passed me a maiden carrying a water-pitcher upon her head, and she thrust into my hand a piece of papyrus whereon was engraven a message to me. Few were the words, yet they were sad indeed, for the queen of the harem had observed the maiden watching me from the lattice, and so she was commanded to stay in an apartment wherefrom she could not see me, nor was she to be allowed to traverse again the streets of Cairo.

"Despair at first seized upon me, then I began to wonder if in some way I could not possess me of the maiden and bear her away to my own land. Keeping at a certain distance from the harem, I closely observed those who passed in and out, and then a strange idea presented itself to me. Every morning there issued from the courtyard a woman of the harem; and I, taking into my confidence the keeper of a bazaar, paid him handsomely to narrowly mark her attire. Next morning when she had emerged I went to the harem and, disguised in an exact counterpart of her clothing, I walked boldly up into the women's apartment."

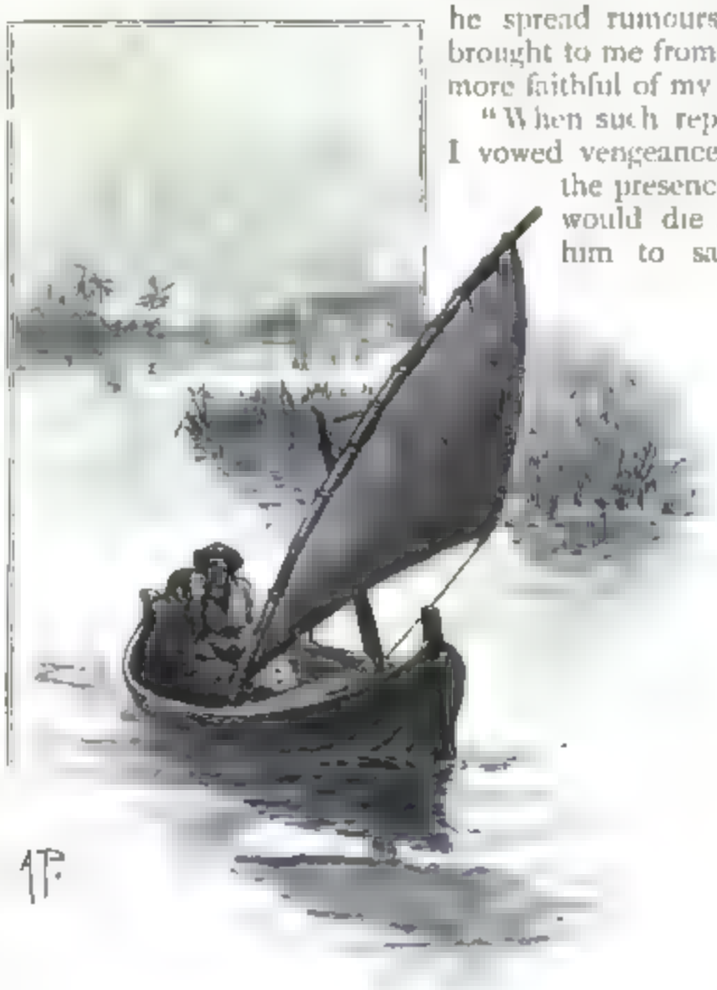
I looked at Hassan eagerly, for such a plan seemed to me unfeasible, but he, accustomed to Oriental stratagems, did not interrupt the narrative,

"Save for my eyes, my face was closely veiled, and, sauntering amid the crowd of beautiful women, my eyes fell upon the apartment wherein, from the papyrus, I knew that my adored one was confined. I opened the door carelessly and, imitating a woman's tone, bade her come forth and follow me into the presence of her lord. She recognised me in a moment, and faltered forth some words of surprise at my daring, which the rest of the women thought were expressions of fear at the fate which might be hers. We reached the lower floor and, passing through the guest chamber, were soon in the court adjacent. No one attempted to bar our way, for my plan was entirely unsuspected, and before it was discovered we were happily beyond pursuit!

"With my lovely bride, Hestra, I journeyed down the peaceful waters of the Nile, and viewed with delighted eyes the green fields of waving corn and the grey ridges of lime-stone rock that at times extended to the river's brink. Down the winding river we floated, until before us lay the cataract where the waters tumbled amid snowy foam, and the red felspar crystals glittered a warmer hue beneath the sun shining in the cloudless blue sky above. Then we ventured to return, and passing through Sinai, crossed into Arabia, whence by slow degrees I brought home the peerless Hestra to the palace from which I had set forth long before.

"So long had my absence been that the one to whom the charge of my palace had been intrusted thought I had perished in lands afar, and so he occupied my place and adorned him with the apparel which befitted me alone as a prince in the land. When at last I arrived at Ghuzni, and he was removed from the position which he had wrongfully assumed, there arose in his breast a feeling of jealousy, and henceforth he sought in many ways to bring sorrow to me or even to encompass me with death. Knowing that I was sprung from the tribe of the Barukzai, he sought to turn against me the enmity of the more powerful Saduzai, and in order to accomplish his purpose he spread rumours abroad which were brought to me from time to time by the more faithful of my slaves.

"When such reports reached my ears I vowed vengeance against him, yet in the presence of Hestra my anger would die away, and so I left him to say what he would, knowing that his words were false. Despite his crooked talk he often entered the palace and listened while I recounted one of my adventures when journeying to Egypt, and then Hestra, my beloved, following the maxim of the great Prophet, busied herself the while with her distaff, stopping occasionally to glance at me with her starlight eyes.



"DOWN THE WINDING RIVER WE FLOATED."

"Now hearken, that I may tell ye the full depths of a man's duplicity. It chanced that he fell ill, and when men inquired of him wherefore, he summoned them to the couch on which he lay and whispered that Hestra, my princess, had the gift of the evil eye, and that his sickness was caused by her! Nay, he even dared to say that I, Prince Darak, was held fast beneath her subtle spells, and that dire evil would surely fall upon the city if she were suffered to live! When the terrible report was brought to me I stood aghast at the depths of the man's baseness, and resolved that no whisper of the rumour should reach the ears of the princess. When in the streets of Ghuzni I chanced to

walk, men turned darkly aside lest they should be contaminated by my presence; for they said that surely my heart was evil to seek after a bride from a strange land, and to thus bring desolation upon them. They dared at last to storm the gates of my palace, and to demand that Hestra should be delivered unto them, that from the lofty rock she might be cast down into the plain below.

"I listened in sullen silence to the blows of their weapons as they smote heavily upon the gates of bronze, and I heard in disdain the wild cries with which they summoned me forth to answer their demand. Then Hestra, learning the dreadful truth, begged that I would yield her unto them lest evil might befall me, for she loved Darak better than her life. Not for a moment did I hearken unto her, for well I knew that mine enemy had inspired the frenzied throng with his malicious words that the fair palace and its treasures might be his.

"When the sheltering night drew dark her mantle round the city, I stole away from the palace with my bride and, crossing the plain over which ye have seen me hunted like a beast, I traversed this mountain pass, even whereon our feet have recently trodden. High above the spot where now we rest I knew that deep in the mountain side was a cave, and thither I bore the princess and placed her safely within it. But our flight was soon discovered, and up the narrow way the enemy swooped, like the screaming vultures that scent their prey from afar.

"I drew my shining blade and, one man against a host, prepared to hold the pass. On they came, even as to-day ye saw them, and raised a derisive laugh when I stood forth, the sole barrier between them and the bride whom the cowards yearned to slay. Yet I was undaunted; for, coming from the cave, behind me stood Hestra, and to fall fighting for her would leave no seal of shame upon my brow.

"Beneath the stars that shone on the snow-clad peak above I stood, and the ringing clash of steel against steel re-echoed from

'NO MORTAL MAN COULD FRONT US SO

crag to crag, until, exhausted, my right arm fell nerveless to my side. I grasped the falling sword in my left hand and still faced the foe, who pressed on over the bodies of their fallen comrades.

"'He is under the influence of the evil eye!' they hoarsely murmured: 'No mortal man could front us so!'

"With knitted brows and teeth fast locked together I hewed my assailants down. Suddenly a cry of distress rose behind me, and for a moment the din of our clashing weapons was unheard.

"One of their number, despairing of his comrades winning the pass, had scaled the overhanging mountain, and climbing down dared to touch with his hands the veil which covered Hestra's face! But the outstretched hands seemed frozen as he did so, and, uttering a wild shriek of terror, he dashed past me, and with excited cries called upon his comrades to follow him, and they fled headlong down the pathway. My senses reeled, and I fell upon the ground in a swoon, and when at daybreak consciousness returned to me, I saw to my astonishment that round my bride had formed a mighty rock of crystal, and then I knew that never again would the hand of man lay sacrilegious touch upon her veil! Never since that night have they ventured to molest me on the mountain, for from Ghuzni's height they yet can behold the top of Hestra's rock glittering in the sun. From the city my presence is banished, and at times when upon me comes the desire to gaze once again upon my palace within which my foe triumphant dwells, and I venture into the city, then am I driven thence. Yet they once used to bow lowly down when my shadow fell upon them, and to fawningly murmur: 'Great is Darak, for he is become a power in the land, and its mighty ruler honours him!'

"Such then was he who now lies an outcast at your feet; but by the Koran, one day my indignities shall be atoned for, and, if I live not once again beneath the roof of my palace, the glare of a torch shall make a yet ruddier glow, and the roof of beaten gold shall flow in a molten stream down the slope of Ghuzni's steep side!"

III.

As he finished his narrative the Afghan started to his feet; his hands were clenched and a fierce light shone in his dark eyes. Then he seemed to remember that we were present, and, hastily recovering himself, he added:—

"But Hestra awaits me, I must pass on May the Prophet bless the Englishmen!" and before we could hinder him, even if we had so desired, he hurried past us, and we saw him threading the mountain path before us.

"Shall we follow him, Frank?" I asked Denviers, as I glanced at him to observe what effect the strange story had upon him, to which we had listened.

"Not now," he answered. "With the recollection of the wrongs which have so deeply stirred him so recently, he might forget the service which we have done him, and I certainly have no desire to try conclusions with him in the pass, as the treacherous Zaduzai did!"

"Wisdom lies in the sahib's words," said Hassan. "This wondrous rock of which he speaks must be easy to find in the pass above us; the Afghan is weary and will seek rest in the cave; and, while yet he sleeps, we may pass in safety and see this strange marvel." We waited until about two hours had passed, then we rose, and, led by Hassan, we toiled up the path which grew narrower as we proceeded, until after passing through some strangely scarred rocks we saw Hassan stop at last, and hold up his hand warningly to us. Then he cautiously moved back to us, and said in a low tone:—

"Sahibs, the Afghan's cave is just in front. Move lightly, for the ears of those of Eastern nations are quick, even in their sleep." We moved forward almost noiselessly, and in a moment more stood before the orifice of the cave and peered in. Upon a low couch made of the skins of animals the Afghan outcast lay sunk in a restful sleep. The fierce look upon his face seemed to be less noticeable, and from the few broken words which came in a soft, passionate tone from his lips, we concluded that in his dreams he was again living beneath the roof of his princely palace. His head rested upon one arm, while the other lay still upon his breast.

Above the dust-stained garb which the Afghan wore we saw, fastened to the rough granite-like side of the cave, a disused sword the handle of which was studded with jewels, while its steel blade, dinted and bent in the conflict of which we had heard, was imbued with a dull red stain. Adorned with this weapon he had doubtless wandered through the streets of Cairo when first the eyes of Hestra met his, and, grasping this sword, he had stood upon the spot from which we were now gazing upon him, while in her defence he had beaten back the relentless foes. Looking at him as he lay there we seemed to

understand the depths of his fallen fortune, and turned uneasily away.

"Hassan," I whispered to our guide, "pass on; we would see the rock before he awakes." The Arab noiselessly advanced, and, with a feeling of suppressed excitement, we followed him. We had only gone a few yards when suddenly we stopped, for before our astonished gaze rose a scene which was difficult for us to realize.

Far in the distance the sun was setting in a sky which seemed to turn the snow upon the mountain peaks into crimson. Thousands of feet below us a miniature village lay, and, standing out rugged and grand, before us was the rock of Hestra. The base of it occupied the space between the two mountain ridges, and thence the rock rose with its jagged top upon which the sky's rich tone seemed to cast its reflection. We advanced slowly to the rock, and for a moment stared blankly at the sight upon which our eyes rested.

Within the transparent rock we saw the form of a woman attired in an Egyptian costume, whose lustrous black eyes seemed to glance lifelike at us from the partly rent veil which covered her face, and which her hands seemed raised towards, as if to protect it.

"Frank," I cried, astonished, "is this a living being before us?" He did not reply immediately, but going quite close to the rock, touched it with his hand and then said:—

"Just place your hand upon the rock for a moment, Harold." I did so and drew it back immediately, for it touched a frozen surface! Round the rock lay scattered a number of large fragments of stone and, pointing to them, Denviers exclaimed:—

"There lies the explanation of what has happened. The man who scaled the mountain, he of whom Darak spoke, probably disturbed as he did so a boulder lying loose below the peak, and its fall was followed by a snowslip which doubtless enveloped the Afghan's bride. Its weight compressed the lower part of it into ice, and the rays of the sun falling upon the outer surface has gradually melted the snow, leaving the ice intact."

"WITHIN THE TRANSPARENT ROCK WE SAW THE FORM OF A WOMAN"

That this was the true explanation there could be no doubt. We drew back and gazed once more upon the wonderful scene before us—surely the most amazing that ever met mer's eyes.

Then slowly we made our way past the cave where the Afghan was still sleeping. We hastened down the mountain path, but the descent was perilous, and night had long closed in before we reached the spot where we had secured our horses and tent previous to climbing the mountain path.

"Hassan," said Denviers, as the Arab stretched himself before the tent to seek repose, "we must be astir betimes in the morning."

"When the rising sun appears, Hassan will awake the Englishmen," he answered; and, faithful to his word, our guide roused us early that we might continue our wanderings.

THE IDOL AT DELHI

Shafts from an Eastern Quiver.

V.—THE SWORD-HILT OF THE IDOL AT DELHI.

By Charles J. Mansford, B.A.

I.

"I AM sorry that we could not persuade Hassan to join us in this attempt," I said to Denviers; "he is a strange character in some respects, but I have no doubt his knowledge of these Hindu temples would have been of great service to us in this scrape. I wonder if we shall escape with our lives?"

"Can't say, Harold," responded my companion; "we are evidently in for it at present. Look at that treacherous guide—how I wish we could hear what he is telling the Brahmins! We were fools to trust him, in face of what Hassan said to the contrary, when he endeavoured to dissuade us from entering the temple. It was a religious scruple entirely which influenced our own guide when he refused to come—the Arab is brave enough otherwise!"

"Never mind, Frank," I replied; "if things come to the worst we shall die game, no doubt, but I certainly would prefer to continue our adventures and travels to being finished off by these fanatics. What villainous countenances they have!"

We were prisoners in a temple near Delhi. After seeing the wonderful rock of Hestra, we started next day in the direction of the Suliman Mountains. Thence we proceeded to Lahore, and, crossing the Punjab, paid a visit to the great fair of Hurdwar, and were now at the sacred city of Delhi, in a difficulty which threatened to effectually terminate our wanderings. We had a special reason for visiting this temple, for during our travels in Persia we had been entertained on one occasion by a famous Parsee at Shiraz. From him we obtained certain information which inspired us with the suicidal notion that we could penetrate into a Hindu temple, succeed in abstracting from it a long-hidden treasure, and thus have sufficient wealth at our disposal to enable us to indulge in whatever travels we cared to undertake without interfering with the proceeds of our first adventure.

We had won his confidence by abjuring in his presence the fragrant weed, for fire in any form was sacred to him, even when contained in the pipe of peace. Talking to the Guebre for some time, we eventually succeeded in persuading him to speak of Nadhir Shah. He related to us a rumour, which was current in Persia, to the effect that during his two months' occupation of Delhi, this famous Shah had hidden some fine brilliants in a temple, and to secure their safety until his departure, a special mode of concealing them had been devised. He averred, with his hand upon his beard, that in the inner court of the temple an idol had

"HE IS TELLING THE BRAHMINS."

been raised in the Shah's honour, and that in its mighty hand was an uplifted sword, of which the hilt was hollow, for in it the diamonds were concealed. Among the few Guebres who possessed the secret of opening the sword-hilt he claimed to be one, and on the morning of our departure from his hospitable roof he pressed a small piece of vellum into the hand of Denviers, on which was written, in Persian, the way in which we might obtain this treasure.

Hassan having failed to dissuade us from the enterprise, we found in Delhi a Hindu who promised to get us into the temple, but whose motive was undoubtedly to trick us, for having led us into the pillared halls, where pilgrims usually congregate, he found some pretext for leaving us with a profound salaam and then betrayed us. We had scarcely time to examine some of the Hindu work which adorned this hall, when we found ourselves seized from behind, and, in spite of a severe struggle, we were overpowered and conducted into a vault-like chamber where some twenty Brahmins were, who seemed to rejoice at our discomfiture. While we were detained in their presence the treacherous guide entered, and we could tell from the excited manner in which he spoke that his opinion of us was not likely to influence his listeners in our favour. He touched his forehead again and again, upon which we saw three broad streaks, placed there to testify to his religious zeal and presence in the morning at the temple. No one except Hassan knew that we had entered the temple, so that it was not likely that blame, or even suspicion, would fall on the fanatics who even at this time had not learned to love those whom they designated as Feringhees.

It was a strange-looking assembly which sat in judgment upon us for violating the sanctity of the temple. Across the shoulders of each was thrown a snow-white cloth, which covered the body, leaving the arms bare; a second cloth was wound round the waist and hung gracefully down. From the left shoulder hung the punul, or sacred thread, which passed across the right side, while round the neck was placed a string of nuts, used as a rosary when reciting certain prayers. They sat in a ring two deep supported on a piled carpet, while four guards, armed with murderous-looking swords, guarded us, two of them to each of us, one standing on the right side and the other on the left.

"WE FOUND OURSELVES SEIZED FROM BEHIND."

"They are evidently disagreed as to what to do with us," said Denviers. "The Brahmin who sits a little higher than the others, and who is evidently their superior, seems to have the amiable intention of urging the rest on to

extremities, if we may judge by the gestures which he is making. I wonder what they will decide. Something not remarkably pleasant for us, no doubt!"

"We shall know too soon, I am afraid," I responded. "Those who seem to speak in our favour are in a very decided minority; but, see, the vote is about to be taken—that will soon settle our fate!"

Some small, white-looking wafers were brought in by a Hindu, who bowed several times to the Brahmins, and then held before them a golden salver, on which the wafers were placed. With a small style, which each Brahmin possessed, a mark was scratched on the voting-tablet, which was then placed in a beautifully carved tube—apparently an elephant's tusk, for it resembled it in shape, tapering off to almost a point at the end, the inside of the tusk having been removed until a mere shell of ivory remained. We were evidently in great disfavour with the Brahmins, for when the votes were divided, the heap which was recorded for us did not contain more than five or six tablets. As the counting of them finished the faces of the Brahmins lit up with satisfaction, and there was a death-like silence which prevailed as we were reluctantly brought before the chief Brahmin to hear our fate decided. We refused to salaam to him, and our guards failed in their attempts to force us to do so. They were commanded to desist at last, and then the chief Brahmin rose, and, holding up his arm in a threatening manner, addressed us, saying:—

"The Feringhees have entered the temple of Shiva, whose representation is bound to the Brahmin's arm. Within this mighty edifice stands the great image of Nadhir, which we honour because Shiva permitted him to bow down our once prostrate nation to the dust. Within these sacred walls your footsteps have wrought profanation, and may bring upon us the vengeance of Shiva if we do not show our abhorrence of your deed. To efface the stain upon the temple blood must be shed even when the sun rises to-morrow. To-night ye may live, for we may not take life in the hours that are given for the restoration of men. Think ye well of this, for surely death is nigh unto both. I have spoken."

We looked for a moment in blank surprise at each other. In a few hours' time we were to die, although we had made no attempt to carry out the purpose for which we entered the temple! The sentence, according to our ideas of justice, was palpably absurd. Then Denviers remarked quietly to me:—

"I suppose we must submit, for argument with these Brahmins is, of course, out of the question. There are a few hours still left, and it will not be our fault if we do not escape them yet. I wonder if they will let us spend the night together or mean to keep us apart."

"The latter, I expect," was the reply I made. "They will be afraid to give us the opportunity to outwit them." My conjecture was, however, erroneous, for soon after the Brahmins rose, and forming into a line, moved away to another part of the temple with a slow and majestic tread, chanting as they did so a low refrain, which sounded ominously upon our ears. It seemed like a funeral dirge sung for their two most unwilling victims!

"Now," said Denviers, "if you see the slightest chance, don't hesitate to throw yourself on these rascally Hindu guards. Remember it is for our lives that we have to contend."

The guards were, however, not inclined to give us the opportunity which we wished for. They turned suddenly upon us, unarmed as we were, and formed an angle across our bodies with their swords by placing the points against the wall and crossing the blades much like a pair of shears look when opened out.

While the four guards effectually prevented us in this way from moving—for had we done so the finely-tempered blades would have gashed us terribly—two other guards entered and bound us securely. A pile of matting was then flung upon the floor for us to rest upon, we were thrust upon it, and then the door was shut and barred upon us from the outside. We were immured safely enough until our gaolers came for us, it appeared, and the next morning would in all probability see the end of our lives.

"How do you think they will kill us?" I asked my companion. "Do you think they will use their swords upon us?"

"I have not the slightest idea," he responded. "Very likely they will strangle us. It is not a very inviting prospect, certainly; if Hassan were here he would say that it was Kismet, and could not be avoided. I expect he is in a great state of excitement because we have not returned."

We lay there and conversed for some time; then, from the silence which Denviers suddenly maintained, I found that, notwithstanding the fate in store for us, he had sunk into a calm sleep, and before long I had followed his example, resting peacefully until the occurrence of a strange event.

II.

The rustling of a dress moving over the stone floor, accompanied by a whispered "Sahib, awake!" roused me from sleep, and looking up, I saw a woman standing with a lamp in her hand, which she held above her head. She was clothed entirely in white, her form being partly concealed by a long, loose garment, which was gathered in about the waist by a girdle. Scanning her features closely, I observed that she had the olive complexion and lustrous eyes which distinguish Hindu women. The peculiar glitter of a bracelet which she wore attracted my attention, and presently I observed it change its position and encircle her arm higher up than before. The bracelet was a living snake, worn, no doubt, as a charm to ward off evil from the woman!

"Is the sahib awake?" my visitant asked. "Speak quietly, sahib, for outside the door of this vault a Hindu guard is posted, and he sleeps but little."

I moved slowly and endeavoured to raise myself, but the bonds with which I had been secured previously had been tied tightly, so that both my wrists and ankles were exceedingly swollen and painful. The woman stooped down, and with a wide-bladed knife she cut the thongs which bound me, and afterwards performed the same good service for my companion.

"STANDING WITH A LAMP IN HER HAND."

"Sahib," she murmured, "I come at this hour to save you if you will trust me. Speak not, but follow me."

Denviers, who by this time was fully aroused, rose to his feet, and together we passed from the apartment by means of a different door to that by which we had entered, and beyond which the Hindu lay. We moved along almost noiselessly, our guide holding high the lamp, the fitful flame from which lit up the passage down which we hastened, expecting every moment that our attempted flight would be discovered. Fortunately, this was not so, however, and our guide, touching a knob in the wall, caused a door to open, after passing through which we found that we were in the main temple wherein stood the mighty image or idol which represented Nadhir Shah. The light from the lamp cast a weird glow upon the huge idol, which occupied the central part of the temple. Ranged round the sides were to be seen many large idols, as varied in form as they were grotesque in appearance. The ceiling was very lofty indeed, and from it there hung long golden chains which supported crystal vessels, in which small lighted wicks glimmered feebly and threw their faint light upon the scene around. In the stillness which reigned on every side of us a feeling of awe possessed me, and I glanced nervously at the strange shadows which were cast from the idols, which seemed to look down grimly at us!

"Sahibs," said our guide and deliverer, "I am endeavouring to save your lives in order to repay, if possible, a debt which I owe to one of your countrymen. When a great famine was upon the fair lands through which the Ganges flows, an Englishman saved my parents from the oppression of the ryots, who would otherwise have ground them into the very dust by their cruel exactions. They at last became prosperous, and vowed that I should recompense Shiva for what had been done in their favour. So they consecrated me to this temple as one of the Dasis, or dancing girls, for whom the Brahmins are solemnly vowed to furnish food and protection. Yet I have never forgotten the deed of the Englishman who saved my parents' lives, and they would indeed rejoice that their daughter had at last an opportunity to repay their debt in such a way as this."

"Are we then able to at once escape from this temple?" I ejaculated.

The Hindu woman replied: "Yes, sahib, you shall escape, but not immediately. To-night I will hide you where none will be able to discover your place of concealment; when morning dawns you must make the effort upon which your life will depend. Hidden within this temple, you will hear

to-morrow the Brahmins as they utter their chants calling upon Shiva to accept the sacrifice which they intend to make. Then a procession will be formed, and, moving thus, they will again enter the council chamber in which you were condemned, for there they will vainly expect to find you bound."

"How will this plan of yours assist us to escape?" interrupted Denviers, glancing at our strange deliverer.

"Sahib, patience, and you shall hear. At the outer door of this temple—which at night is strongly guarded—you will find in the daytime only two Hindus armed with swords. Your approach will doubtless be heard however softly you may tread, such is the acuteness of hearing which distinguishes our race. Two minutes afterwards your fate will be irrevocably decided." Taking them from beneath her robe, the Dasi held out to each of us a wide-bladed knife and then continued:—

"Armed thus, you will each engage with one of the guards. Knife against sword is unequal fighting; act, therefore, only on the defensive, and stain not Shiva's temple. When the swords fall, ward them off, and make a dash for the passage. Proceeding thence straight onward, you will see another door; and on pressing against it, you will find that it leads into the pilgrims' hall, which abuts upon the street. Once there, and your peril is over."

"Where are we to remain hidden until then?" I asked.

"In yonder idol, sahib; for within it is a hollow known to few even of the Brahmins. Follow me, and I will show you the way in which entry and egress can be made."

Passing to the rear of the idol, we observed a strange triangular mark, and while our own efforts to find the clue to the opening of the idol were futile, the Dasi in a moment was successful, after which she whispered the secret to us. Touching a hidden spring, a door flew open, and then we saw a flight of narrow steps, which led into a round chamber above in the monstrous idol.

"SHE HELD OUT TO EACH OF US A WIDE-BLADED KNIFE."

"Here rest safely till dawn," said our guide. "The temple is deserted now save by the great spirits whose vigils you may not disturb. Fare you well, and remember for

your lives the instructions which have been given." We listened for a few minutes while the sound of her rustling dress grew fainter and fainter upon our ears as the woman passed away and left us within the idol. There was a faint light, which entered the chamber in which we were, coming apparently from the lamp flickering before the huge image, and from its upward direction in two rays we surmised that it passed through the cavities intended to represent the nostrils of Nadhir!

"It will be dangerous work fighting with these niggers," said Denviers. "Fortunately we can both fence well; yet I know that the Hindus pour in their blows like the hail comes down. Hadn't we better try to get those diamonds? If we escape, which I almost doubt even now, we shall be well repaid for risking the dangers of this adventure."

"As you will," I responded, and touching the strange door, to which we had again descended, it flew open. We closed it quietly, and a moment afterwards stood facing the idol of Nadhir!

III.

"READ the Guebre's instructions, Frank," I remarked, "and as you do so I will carefully observe the hand of the idol and the sword-hilt which it grasps."

The idol itself represented, in the usual exaggerated size, the former conqueror of Delhi. Sitting on a heap which was intended to represent to the observer a pile of human heads, there was held in the left hand a writhing human form, while in the right hand, which was raised aloft, was a sword made of gold, thickly jewelled, and which was about to fall on the unhappy victim. While I was carefully noting these things Denviers read as follows:—

"*He who would obtain the diamonds from the sword-hilt must climb to the right knee of the idol, and standing thereon force the thumb backwards. The hold upon the hilt will relax for a second and the treasure fall to the ground. Beware that the thumb of the idol does not grip the hand of the daring one, for then the sword will fall and smite him. I, Hasfejd, do so declare.*"

Denviers mounted upon my shoulders, and in this way reached the knee of the idol. Standing as directed, he followed the statement carefully, and to our astonishment for we had not placed much hope in the information being exact or in its consequence—the hand partially unclasped, the hilt flew open, and when it closed a yellow roll of muslin already lay at my feet! When Denviers had descended we proceeded to examine the treasure. Unrolling the outer wrapper we found eight small packages within it. Each of these was carefully unfastened, and proved to be a history of the gem which it surrounded. The diamonds were finely cut, and sparkled even in the dim light of the temple.

We disposed of the treasure by each placing four diamonds in our inner pockets, and then, having made a survey of the temple, re-entered the hollow head of the idol.

The Brahmins were beginning their devotions when I awoke and found Denviers watching them through the cavities already mentioned in the idol's face. As the ceremony proceeded the worshippers seemed to become frenzied, and contorted their bodies as they prostrated themselves and vowed to destroy the polluters of the temple. They suddenly rose from the ground and formed in a double line, headed by several Hindu guards, who were evidently intended to drag us to the temple if we refused to submit to the fate in store for us without making a final effort to free ourselves.

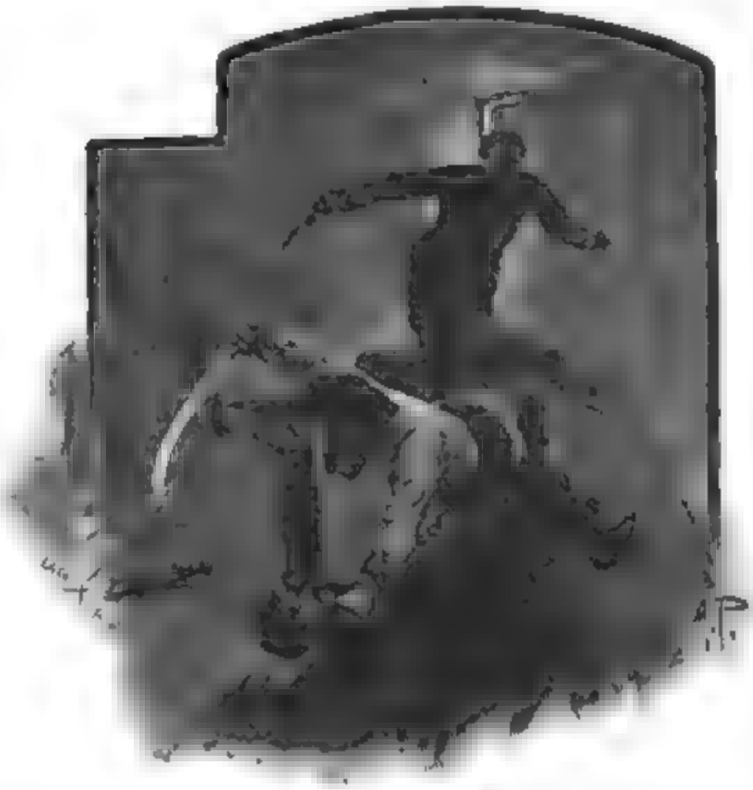
As the last Brahmin left the temple, Denviers cautiously opened the door of our hiding place and peered out.

"Come on," said he; "one bold effort and we are free!" I followed him closely down the passage as indicated by the Dasi, and when about half-way down we perceived the two guards. They were examining something upon the wall, and we hoped to get near them without being observed.

"Get down on the ground, and crawl along after me," said Denviers; "they are not looking this way. Your man is to be the shorter one of the two—leave the other to me." We moved along as stealthily as tigers; if only we could take them by surprise! Nearer yet—the object on the wall still interested them. We were only ten yards away. Then we lay almost flat, and forced ourselves along a few inches at a time. Nine yards—eight seven! Denviers jumped to his feet; we were seen! In a second the Hindus closed with us. There was a gong fastened to the wall, and one of them attempted to strike it, but my companion interposed his body between it and the Hindu.

None of us spoke; the combat was too fierce for that. How well they fenced! I feared that my knife was too short to ward off the Hindu's sword. Denviers was getting the better of the enemy with whom

he fought, and the tall Hindu was wounded, although he fought bravely on. I felt that it was a matter of life or death, and made a lunge at my own foe to settle which of us should conquer. He parried the blow, and a moment after I was down with the Hindu kneeling upon my chest, and his sword-point at my throat. I saw something white gleam before my eyes, then the Hindu was pulled violently from me. I rose and saw the second Hindu lying motionless. My former antagonist was wrestling futilely with Denviers, and as his sword fell I rushed and picked it up. There was a sudden cry of alarm which rang down the passage, for the Brahmins, we knew, had discovered our flight!



"IT WAS A MATTER OF LIFE OR DEATH."

"Run to the outer door," cried Denviers, "and hold it open; I can finish this nigger before they reach us."

I flung wide the door just as the other guards came down the passage. Denviers held on to the Hindu for a minute, then lifted him bodily from the ground and dashed him full at the nearest guard! In a moment he reached the door; we were outside and making for the pilgrims' hall, whence we found our way unbarred to the street, which we regained in safety.

"A warm piece of work, Frank!" I said, as we turned towards Delhi. "I thought that Hindu had finished my career."

"He was well formed although so slight," assented Denviers; "but the best part of the whole affair is that we got the diamonds!"

Shafts from an Eastern Quiver.

VI.—THE HINDU FAKIR OF THE SILENT CITY.

By Charles J. Mansford, B.A.

I.

"WHAT an extraordinary scene!" said Denviers, as we sat under the veranda of a Hindu house facing the street.

"Well," I responded, "after what we saw at Jaganath I am scarcely surprised at anything in India."

"The sahibs have reached Conjeve just in time," said our guide, Hassan, as he stood behind us watching what was transpiring with his grave eyes, "for of all the sights in Southern India this is surely the most remarkable!"

After our escape from the temple at Delhi and the capture of the diamonds from the sword-hilt of the idol which it contained, we had passed through the long plain of the Ganges, and eventually reached Calcutta. We then determined to travel along the coast of India, and, after witnessing the death of several voluntary victims beneath the wheels of the famous car of Jaganath, we pushed on to Madras, and thence to Conjeve, where we were destined to meet with a strange adventure.

"What is the cause of all this excitement, Hassan?" asked Denviers, as he looked into the thronged street.

"It is the first day of the festival which is kept every year," he answered; "the image yonder on the idol car is that of the principal god."

Amid the wild cries and excited gesticulations of the onlookers we saw a car fully forty feet in height, and shaped like a tower or gopuram, upon which was placed the gigantic image of a god riding upon a bull carved in black granite, and with its horns gilded. The whole of the car was covered with grotesque carvings, while before the solid wheels, on which it moved slowly along, was a crowd of pilgrims and devotees pulling with all their might at the ropes as they were cheered on by the vast concourse which lined the streets.

"We may as well get a nearer view of the car," said Denviers, as he rose from the chair on which he had been sitting. "The carving upon it is certainly worth closer examination." Hassan placed his hand on my companion's shoulder as he said quickly:—

"THE FESTIVAL."

"It is no wise thing which the sahib proposes to do. I know that he is brave, but in the hands of the frenzied worshippers there, alone or together, we should fare badly. It is well not to run into needless danger at such a time. Will not the sahib hear the words of Hassan, since more than once has he seen enacted a terrible deed in the streets of Conjeve?"

"I see no reason why we should be afraid to go among the crowd yonder," returned Denviers; then, turning to me, he added, "Come on, Harold, the idol car is half-way up the street!" I rose and followed him, and, as I did so, turned to the Arab, saying:—

"You need not come, Hassan, unless you wish to; we will soon return."

"The Arab does not fear for himself," responded Hassan, calmly. "Where the Englishmen go their slave is ready to follow," and a moment after we were pushing and jostling in the crowd which followed the car. Hindus in their white robes and gaily-coloured turbans; women profusely adorned with jewellery on their arms and necks and in their hair, which was uncovered; and besides these, religious mendicants, jugglers, and pilgrims smeared with ashes, whose clothes were less than scanty, all made up the excited throng into which we thrust ourselves.

In spite of the deep bronze which overspread our features, the effect of our prolonged travels, many curious glances were turned upon us, some of them friendly enough, but others expressive of hatred that we should dare to mingle with those whose foreheads were duly inscribed with the sacred marks which betokened their devotion to the idol.

Whether Hassan's recent remarks were caused by a foreboding of evil or not it is difficult to say, but in our anxiety to reach the idol car we pressed on forgetful of him. When we had succeeded in satisfying our curiosity, I looked round, and found that Hassan was not be seen. Turning to Denviers, I asked:—

"What has become of our guide, Frank?" To my surprise, he responded:—

"I thought we had left him behind; he seemed disinclined to come with us, and I have not seen him since we left the veranda."

"But he followed us," I persisted; "he was close behind until a few minutes ago, I am certain." My companion, however, remarked, lightly:—

"We shall see him again before long. Hassan has been in Conjeve before to-day; I dare say he thought that pushing through a crowd of Hindus on such a hot day as this is, was not quite the form of pleasure that he cared to indulge in. No doubt he is under the veranda again by this time, meditating on our folly and his own wisdom."

Denviers had hardly finished speaking when a great din rose in the street through which we had passed. Something unusual had evidently happened, and, connecting the event somehow with our guide, we made a desperate attempt to break through the throng which we saw had gathered round a spot where the street widened to accommodate one of the temples which we met at every few yards in Conjeve. The excitement rapidly spread, and in a few minutes we were hemmed in by a swaying mass of humanity, in which to either advance or to retreat was impossible. Fortunately for us the height of those in the crowd before us did not completely hide the view, and with a little struggling we managed to get some idea of what had happened.

Standing with his left arm behind him close to an opening in the ruined wall of a temple was our faithful guide Hassan, parrying dexterously the savage thrusts which were being made at his body by an ugly-looking fakir, or religious enthusiast. The latter was clothed in a tightly-bound yellow garment, his face—dark and fierce—being partly hidden by the matted, neglected hair which hung down as far as his shoulders. Unlike the rest of the Hindus in the crowd, he wore a long, shaggy beard, to betoken that he had undertaken some vow, and his countrymen were urging him on to the combat, while they were careful to keep themselves out of the reach of Hassan's blade, which flashed as he warily kept the fakir at bay.

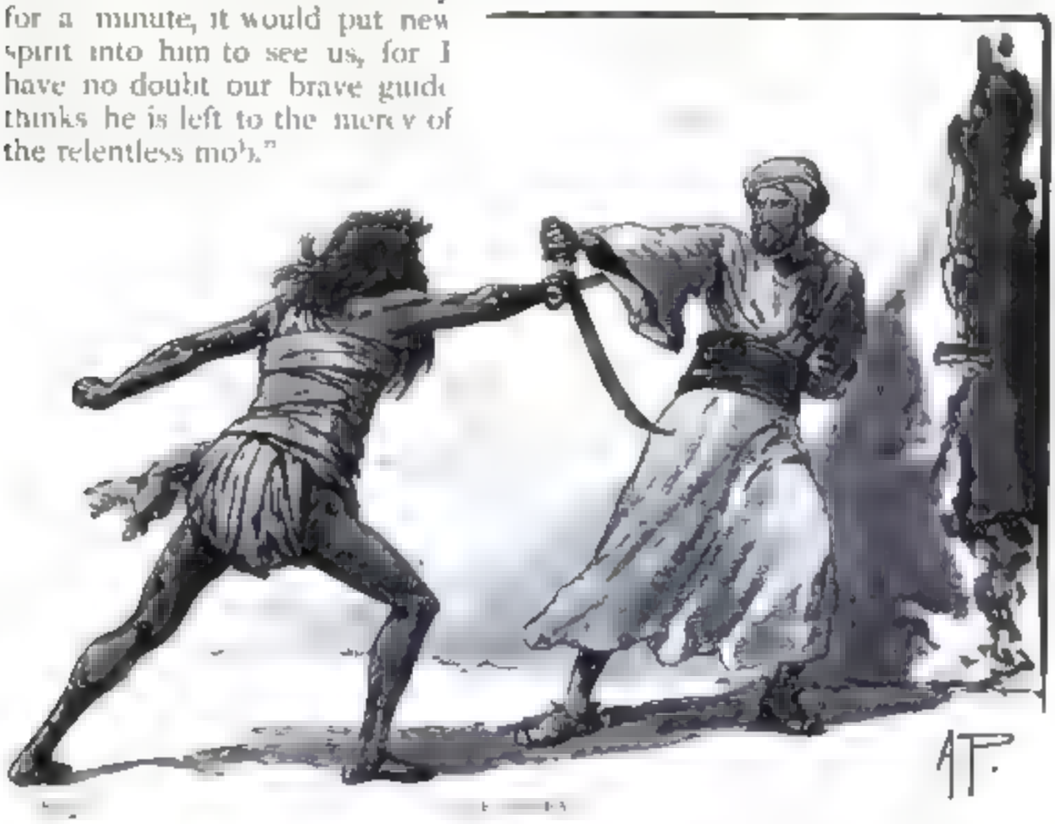
"If only I could get through this crowd, somehow," said Denviers, "I would paint that fakir's robe a different colour for him. I wonder what Hassan did to cause all this commotion?"

"Very little, no doubt," I responded. "Hassan is too cautious to offend, wilfully, the prejudices of a fanatic." Then, watching the struggle in which we were quite unable to join, I added:

"Hassan is giving the fakir plenty of hard work, and the yelling mob can tell that plainly enough. I suppose if their comrade loses there will be an ugly rush upon the Arab, and we shall, possibly, have a few minutes' tough fighting."

"Hassan little thinks we are in the crowd

watching him," said Denviers. "At present the crush is so intense that I cannot get my hand down to touch the handle of my sword. I wish he would look this way for a minute, it would put new spirit into him to see us, for I have no doubt our brave guide thinks he is left to the mercy of the relentless mob."



"What a splendid thrust!" I exclaimed, as Hassan, parrying a blow aimed at his head, narrowly missed piercing his enemy's chest. It was strange how much we had become attached to Hassan, for, in spite of his passion for committing small depredations from us on every possible opportunity, our guide presented a combination of qualities rarely met with in the East. Certainly the pluck which he displayed on this occasion was something for any Englishman to admire, and as I looked into my companion's face while he fumed at our helplessness, I saw the glances of admiration which he bestowed on the Arab. The cries of the frenzied throng grew fiercer, for they saw that, having at first acted on the defensive, Hassan now began to press the fakir considerably, whom he wounded, indeed, several times in quick succession.

Our guide was not destined, however, to win the combat, for one of the Hindus bolder than the rest suddenly darted upon him from one side, and in the momentary surprise which this brought to Hassan, he glanced aside. In a second, the sword which he held was wrenched from his hand and fell on the ground, while the Hindu, slipping off the cloth which formed his turban, bound Hassan as the fakir held him. There was a loud cry of satisfaction from the Hindus as they saw this, and a moment afterwards they attempted to throw themselves upon the defenceless Arab. The fakir, however, waved them off, and then called something out, the purport of which we did not understand. The surging crowd immediately took up the cry, while, securing the advantage of the rush, we pushed and elbowed our way to within a few yards of Hassan, where we were again completely hindered from advancing. The Arab glanced towards us, and struggled to free his arms, but in vain; and then we saw the fakir and the Hindu forcibly drag our guide through the gap in the broken wall which we had already observed.

Denviers managed to unsheath his sword, and as he did so the crowd drew back for a moment, then turned furiously upon us. We had reached the gap in the interval, and, dashing aside a scowling Hindu who ventured to bar the entrance, we darted through it, and found ourselves in a small paved court, at the end of which was a dwelling, one story in height and evidently built long before, for the chunam which had been used to plaster it over lay scattered about it. We pushed through the *débris*, and beat violently on the door. No answer was returned, and we thereupon burst it in, to find ourselves confronted by the fakir!

II

"WHY do the Feringhees force their way into my abode uninvited?" he asked, as he turned his evil-looking face towards us.

"Where is the man whom you just dragged through the gap in the outer wall of the temple which is apparently beyond here?" said Denviers, answering the first question

with a second one. A scornful smile crossed the face of the fanatic as he answered :-

"I know not of whom ye speak; no Feringhee, save yourselves, has entered here." Denviers looked threateningly at the man as he gave this equivocating reply, and I saw his right hand wander to the handle of the sword which he had sheathed after passing through the gap.

"We do not seek an Englishman," he said, in a tone of suppressed anger, "but for our Arab guide. If you have dared to injure him you shall surely die."

The fakir glanced at us defiantly for a moment, then flung himself upon the rush matting which covered a portion of the stone floor of the dilapidated and wretched room in which we stood.

"STRIKE IF YE WILL"

"Strike if you will," he said in his fierce tone, "yet I will not deal a blow in return, for not thus will the secret be wrung from me which ye vainly covet." Denviers stood for a moment irresolute. He could not injure a man who evidently had no intention to defend himself if attacked, and yet he knew that every minute wasted in this way was precious to us indeed. I made a careful examination of the room, observing it thus narrowly to discover if in this way a clue to Hassan's whereabouts might be obtained. The walls were apparently made of sun-dried mud and were entirely bare of ornament, save for some strange marks scored upon them, and which corresponded with those upon the fakir's forehead. The fragments of ceiling above consisted of a few bamboo rafters, covered doubtless at some former time with palm-leaf thatch, but at this period almost bared to the sky. The rush mat on which the fakir lay and a few broken earthen vessels formed the entire furniture of the wretched man's hut, into which we knew Hassan must have been brought—for no other way to reach the temple-like building which towered beyond it existed between this hovel and the gap in the wall, since on either side of the fakir's abode a second wall ran parallel to the outer one.

"What are we to do now?" I asked Denviers, dejectedly. "This cowardly fanatic, assisted by the Hindu, has certainly made away with Hassan, and yet the wall of the room opposite seems to contain no exit, the only one being that by which we entered this hovel."

"Be patient for a few minutes, Harold," said Denviers, "we shall find out the secret directly; meanwhile keep before the doorway, and whatever happens don't let this fellow escape in that direction."

I uttered a few words of assent, and took up the position which my companion had indicated, as he moved slowly towards the reclining fakir, and then stooped over him, saying, as he did so :

"You are weary after the fight which took place between yourself and the Arab just now in the street yonder; nay, you are badly wounded!" and Denviers pointed quietly to a dark stain which was conspicuous upon the fanatic's robe.

"Yes," he answered, fiercely, "but the dog who did it shall die as surely as I have a vow to fulfil." He moved his body restlessly upon the rush matting, and a moment afterwards, to my astonishment, I saw Denviers seize hold of the matting and attempt, forcibly, to drag it from beneath the fakir! The latter leapt suddenly to his feet and exclaimed.

"Why touch with your polluting hands the sole resting-place for my weary frame?"

Denviers pointed to the spot where the fakir had spread the mat and answered :—

"The entrance to the place where the Arab has been taken lies there; lead us to him that we may set him free, or we will drag you there by force."

"The Feringhee is quick-witted and has even discovered the secret way; why then

should I conduct him thither?" Denviers drew from his finger a ring set with a brilliant which he wore, and holding it out towards the fakir, responded:

"The reason why you should do so is there, for by the begging gourd which is upon the floor I judge that you are poor. Take this, and lead us to the Arab." The eyes of the fanatic gazed with cupidity upon the gem. Taking it with an eager clutch he said:—

"Feringhee as thou art, I accept what thou offerest. What threats could not accomplish has been won with a bribe!" The fakir's tone jarred upon my ears, and I felt that his promise was an insincere one. I uttered a few words of caution to Denviers expressive of my distrust just as the fakir stooped and raised with apparent ease a block of stone from those which formed the floor of the hovel, and, pointing downwards, said in a reluctant tone, as if repenting of his bargain:

"The twisted ladder of palm-shoots which ye see, reaches from here to the bottom of a passage leading to the place ye seek. Dare ye, with all your bravery, venture thither?" We looked shudderingly down the yawning, gloomy gulf, and saw a faint light, which came from the passage far below. Denviers turned to me and said quietly:

"We must risk it for the sake of Hassan." Then turning to the fakir he added, sternly: "Go down first, we will then follow you; betray us if you dare." Denviers waited until our fierce guide had descended, then clung to the ladder, and with a few encouraging words, bade me follow. Slowly and cautiously we descended, the frail ladder oscillating violently with us in the pitchy darkness. Occasionally we stopped, and endeavoured with our eyes to pierce the gloom, fearing lest the fakir had evolved some treacherous scheme in order to entrap us. At last we reached the bottom, and found ourselves at what was the end of a rocky passage, which had been roughly hewn out and sloped upwards. Into this the light from outside was stealing from the distant entrance. The fakir cast a strange, inquiring glance at us as we joined him in this subterraneous place, but beyond muttering something incoherently to himself, did not volunteer any remark until we had traversed the entire passage. Emerging into daylight once more, we stopped suddenly, and gazed in bewilderment at the scene before us.

Towering in the distance rose the ruins of a vast temple, resting above a rock which seemed to have been partly excavated into the form of arches. In the central niche was a huge representation in stone similar to the idol which we had seen that day dragged through the streets, while on either side of it was carved a great throng of worshippers adoring it. The rock in the background was deeply cut to present the appearance of the side of a street, while many strange emblems were shown thereon. Below were the remains of a ruined village, the miserably small hovels contrasting forcibly with the grandeur and boldness of the wonderful carvings above. How many centuries had passed since the place was inhabited it seemed impossible for us to surmise. The ground was thickly covered with a jungle-like grass, and I noticed that part of it seemed to have been recently beaten down. I pointed this fact out to my companion, who responded:

"DARE YE VENTURE?"

"Very likely that

happened when Hassan was dragged into this place, for I expect he resisted pretty stoutly." We saw the fakir throw himself prostrate upon the ground as he faced the stone idol, then, raising his body slowly, he approached us and asked:

"Have the Feringhees seen aught like this silent city before?" Denviers shrugged his shoulders impatiently as he answered:

"Show us the spot where the Arab is hidden; we did not come here to look at the work of a race of fanatics. If the trampled grass before us indicates anything, you have dragged him into one of these caves which surround us."

The fakir gave a shrill laugh, which re-echoed from cave to cave. Then he replied:

"A stranger cause than ye suppose was that which beat down the grass before us growing amid these ruins which ye have dared to enter, yet shall ye see the cave wherein is the imprisoned one whom ye seek." He moved across the dry, rustling grass as he spoke, closely followed by us. In the shadow of the ruins above, one side of this vast hollow seemed to grow dim, the caves running into it appearing gloomy and uninviting. When he had neared one of the caves the fakir stopped and, pointing to it, said:

"That is the place ye seek and to learn about which ye bribed me. The man lies asleep, but stooping over him ye may rouse the Arab and take him hence." I glanced for a moment at the fanatic as he spoke. Beneath his disordered and matted hair a fierce hatred seemed to light up his eyes as they were directed towards us. As we approached the entrance of the cave, another shrill laugh came from his lips; turning round I saw him wave his arms wildly in the air and then disappear into one of the cavities, just as Denviers exclaimed:

"Follow me cautiously, Harold; it is quite possible that some plot may be revealed to us in a moment. I have no confidence whatever in this treacherous fakir."

We entered the cave, my companion leading the way and softly calling Hassan's name. No reply came forth, however, and when we had advanced a few yards he stopped, saying:

"Perhaps Hassan is asleep, after all. Unless my eyes deceive me in the gloom, there is certainly something lying in the cave a little farther on." I peered carefully into the dark cave, and then became aware of two bright red spots shining just in front of us.

"Frank," I said to my companion,

"I SAW DENVIERS STRUGGLING WITH A HUGE TIGRESS."

"Hassan is lying there, sure enough. I can see his eyes turned towards us: I wonder why he ——" I left the sentence unfinished, for Denviers, uttering a warning cry to me, turned and fled from the cave. I felt his breath come fast upon me as he pressed on from behind me, then a moment afterwards, just as we emerged from the cave, I heard him fall with a heavy thud to the ground.

Turning quickly round, I saw to my consternation that Denviers was struggling might and main with a huge tigress, which held him down as he tried to grip her by the throat!

III.

The struggles of my companion only seemed to infuriate the tigress still more, and for a moment it was impossible for me to attempt to rescue him. I drew my hunting-knife, and when a favourable opportunity arrived lunged at her as I threw myself bodily upon the tigress, determined to save Denviers at all hazards. The fierce beast, recognising that her injury had been inflicted by me, left my companion and, raising one paw, dashed me headlong to the ground. In a moment she bounded heavily upon me as I lay there, her weight crushing and bruising me severely. Immediately afterwards I felt myself lifted bodily from the ground, and the brute began to carry me away to the cave into which we had been recently lured by the treacherous fakir! I made one supreme effort to release myself, and succeeded as I thought in doing so, for the tigress dropped me and bounded with a fierce cry towards her lair, just as I heard the sharp ping of a bullet re-echo through the silent city. My companion rushed up, and, stooping over me, asked:—

"Harold, are you much hurt? I have shot the brute, she will never reach the end of her cave alive!" I staggered to my feet, and, looking towards the animal's lair, saw the body of the tigress lying motionless within the entrance.

"Not badly," I answered, "except that I got some pretty severe bruises in the encounter." We rested quietly for several minutes; then I questioned:

"Frank, where is Hassan concealed? We must rescue him somehow!" Denviers rose as he answered:

"It is certain that he is hidden in one of these caves, very likely where the fakir is now."

"Then we must make a careful search for him," I responded; "but this time we will improvise some torches, so as to get a good view of these gloomy caverns before venturing into another one of them." We twisted together some of the tangled grass, and made for the direction in which the fakir went, just when he saw that his cunningly contrived plot was apparently successful.

When we reached the caves Denviers turned to me and said:

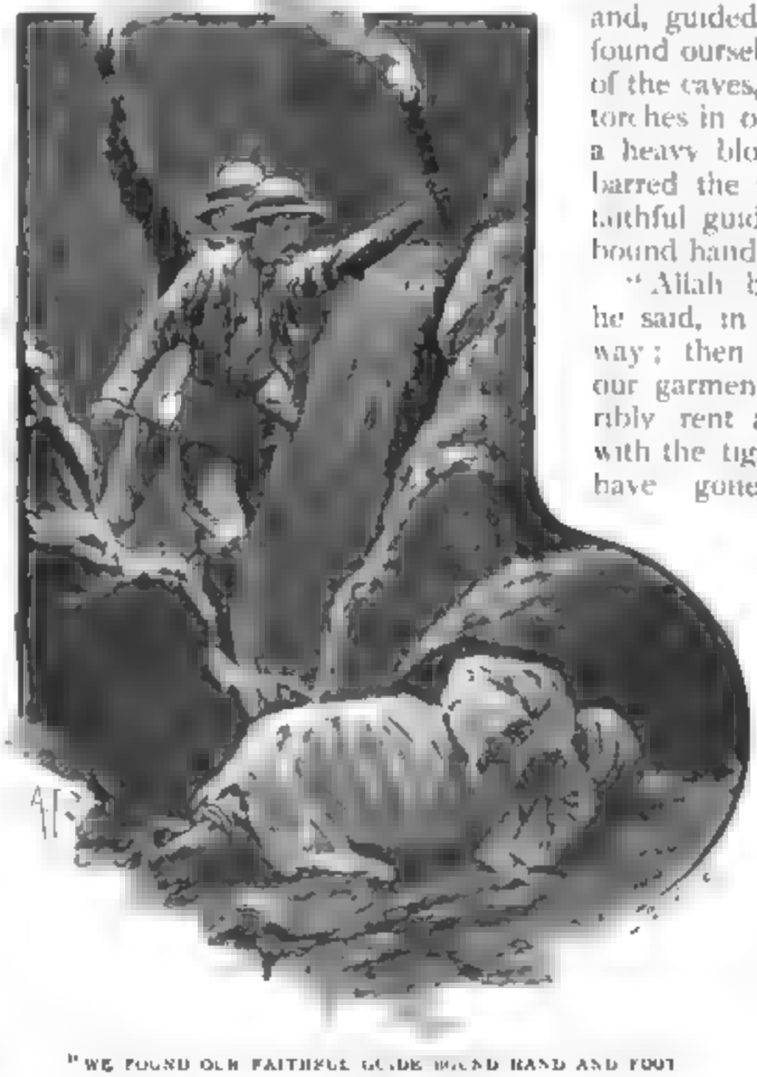
"I think it would be a good plan to call out our guide's name from time to time, he may hear us, and unless he is gagged will respond, and so lead us to him." To this remark I readily assented, and standing before several of the caves which lay close together, my companion shouted:

"Hassan!"

To our great joy we heard the well-known voice of the Arab answer us from a little distance. We shouted again, and, guided by his responses, found ourselves traversing one of the caves, holding the blazing torches in our hands. Moving a heavy block of stone which barred the way, we found our faithful guide lying behind it, bound hand and foot.

"Allah bless the sahibs!" he said, in his grave, Oriental way; then his eyes fell upon our garments, which were terribly rent after our encounter with the tigress. "The sahibs have gone through peril to rescue me," he continued, as Denviers speedily unbound him, "their slave will be ever faithful to them."

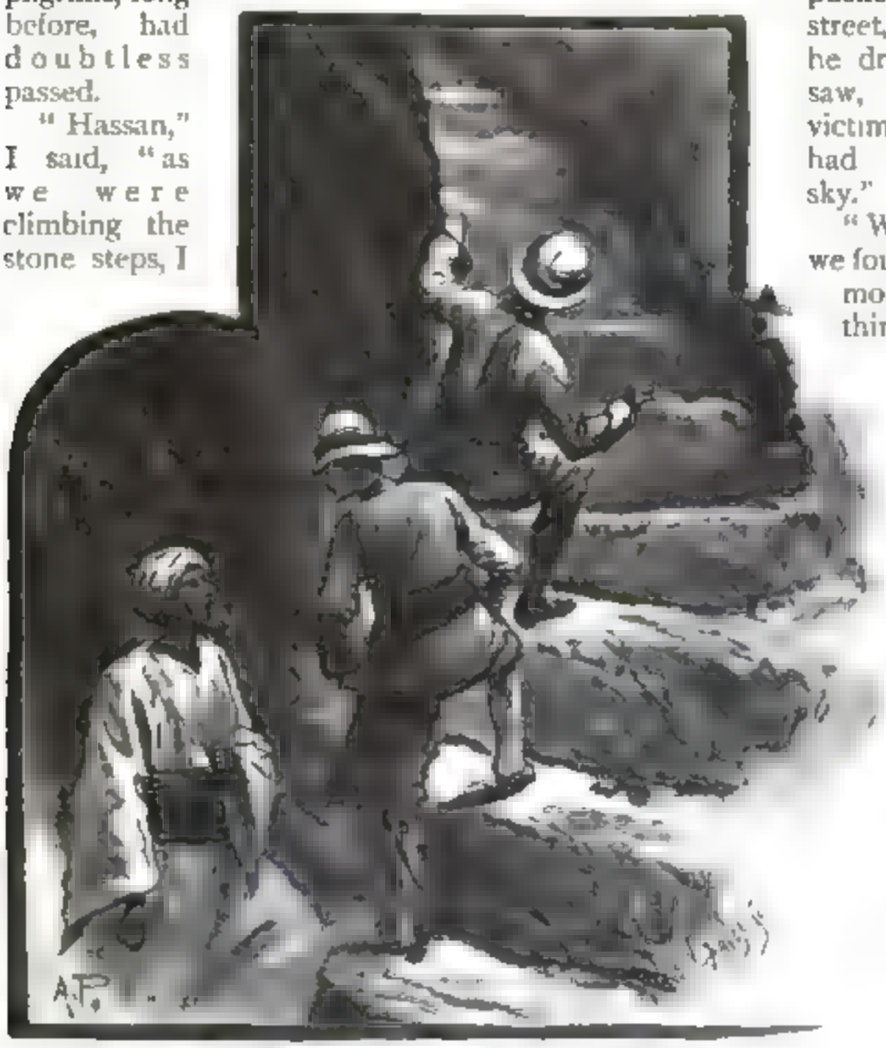
We had some difficulty in getting Hassan from the cave, his limbs being swollen and painful, but at last we emerged and sought for some way of egress other than the one



"WE FOUND OUR FAITHFUL GUIDE BOUND HAND AND FOOT"

we knew, owing to its difficulty. At the far side of the hollow we found some rudely-carved steps, deeply worn, by which the people of the now silent city had entered the temple which they had built for themselves. Climbing these we passed through the gigantic ruin, and saw vast fragments of the roof lying scattered among fallen idols. The wall beyond was in ruins also, and we found a gap through which we went. The outer wall still confronted us, but at last we reached a stone gateway through which the pilgrims, long before, had doubtless passed.

"Hassan," I said, "as we were climbing the stone steps, I saw the fakir and the Hindu start from a cave and come forth to watch us. Their plot has been foiled; what did they intend to do with you?" The Arab gazed at our torn garments again and then responded:—



"WHAT DID THEY INTEND TO DO WITH YOU?"

"Will the sahibs tell me how their garb was rent?" We gave him a short account of what had happened, to which he replied:—

"This is the explanation of what occurs: Into the silent city, which we have left, a tigress entered and took up her abode. The Hindus, surprised at this strange marvel, sought for its solution. They at last concluded that the god who rides upon the bull was angry with them, and called upon this fakir to help them. He declared that someone had polluted a temple, and that until some stranger fell a victim to the tigress the god would not be appeased! His long beard, which ye have seen, indicated the vow he made to find the one who should suffer. He purposely pushed violently against me in the street, and when I remonstrated he drew his sword. The rest ye saw, and I was to become the victim to the tigress when the sun had thrice streaked the eastern sky."

"Well, Hassan," said Frank, as we found ourselves on the way once more to Conjeve, "don't you think the adventure which we have had brought us more pleasure than sitting under the veranda?"

"The sahibs are brave, and make light of the rescue of Hassan, the dust beneath their feet, whom they saved from the tigress, now dead."

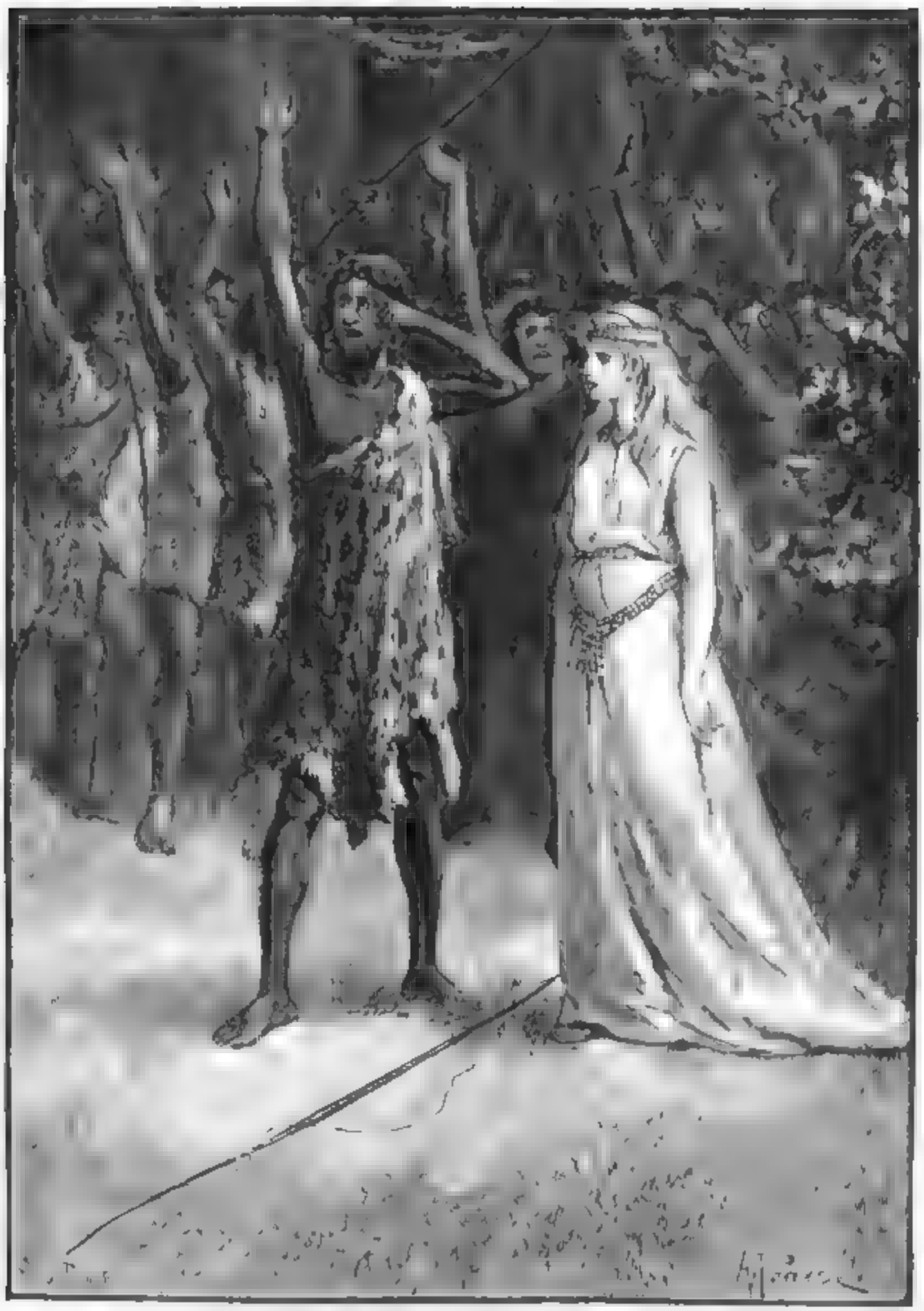
"I am sorry the brute is dead!" interposed Denviers, as he listened to the Arab's remark. The latter turned his grave eyes upon my companion and asked:—

"Why, sahib?"

My companion smiled at Hassan as he replied:—

"Because she might have taken it into her head one day that the fakir would furnish a toothsome meal, and so have demolished him accordingly, adorned with his yellow robe."

We reached the Hindu's house at which we were staying, and were glad to rest ourselves after the events of the day, for the tigress had left some marks upon Denviers also, which from his conversation I subsequently discovered, while my own injuries were much more severe than I had supposed at the time when the tiger attacked me.



"WE SWEAR!"

(Margarita, the Bond Queen of the Wandering Dhahs.)

Shafts from an Eastern Quiver.

VII.—MARGARITA, THE BOND QUEEN OF THE WANDERING DHAHS.

By Charles J. Mansford, B.A.

I.

"THE Cingalese declare that the Queen of the Dhahs is a Sahibmem," said Hassan—meaning by this expression an Englishwoman.

"I don't think that can be true," responded Denviers; "it is hardly possible that any civilized human being would care to reign over such a queer race as those just described appear to be——"

"The Englishman is wrong in what he says," interrupted an indolent-looking native, "for I once saw her myself!"

"You!" I exclaimed, "then tell us what you know about this queen." The native was, however, by no means disposed to conversation, or indeed to do anything that disturbed his serenity.

From Southern India we had crossed over to Ceylon, and after a somewhat prolonged stay at Colombo, struck into the interior of the island. We visited Kandi, and having travelled for some days in the hilly district which surrounds it, arrived at the palm-covered hut of a Cingalese labourer, where, in spite of his protests, we stayed for a day to rest ourselves. Round the stems of the palms about us we saw, high up, that dead brushwood had been placed, by the rustling of which at night our unwilling host could tell if his few neighbours contemplated robbing him of the fruits of his toil. The only work, however, which he seemed to do was to stand at the door of his hut and gaze vacantly at the plantation of palm trees which he owned, and to shake his head—usually in the negative—whenever we attempted to entice him into a conversation.

"Well," said Denviers, looking with annoyance at our host, "if this Cingalese is too idle to tell us the full facts, I suppose we had better find them out for ourselves." Then turning to the man he asked:—

"How far is the district over which these strange Dhahs are said to wander?" The native pointed slowly to the north and then answered:—

"THE NATIVE POINTED TO THE NORTH."

"The Dhahs were wandering afar in the forest when last I saw them, which was fully

a day's journey from here, but the sun was hot and I grew tired." His remark certainly did not convey much information to us, but before an hour had elapsed we set out, guided only by the forest, which could be seen far away in the distance. Hour after hour passed until at last evening came, and even then we were only entering upon the fringe of the great forest which rose before us, and seemed to shut out the sky as we wandered into the thickness of the undergrowth and gazed up at the lofty tops of the trees which bent each other's branches as they interlaced one with another.

We stopped at last to rest and to refresh ourselves, after which we reclined upon the ground, facing a wide clearing in the forest, where we laid talking idly for some time, until the voice of Hassan warned us that someone was approaching. We listened attentively for a minute, but no sound could be heard by us save that of the fluttering of the wings of some bird among the branches above.

"You heard nothing, Hassan," said Denviers, "or else you mistook the rustling above for someone wandering in the forest glade." The Arab turned to my companion and then responded:—

"Hassan has long been accustomed to distinguish different sounds from a distance, the one which was heard a minute ago was caused by a human foot." He pointed to a tangled clump a little to the right of us, as he continued:—

"Listen, sahibs, for the sound of footsteps is surely drawing near. From yonder thicket the wanderer will doubtless emerge." Presently a sound fell upon our ears, and a moment afterwards we heard the crackling of dead twigs as if someone was passing over them.

"The feet of the one who is approaching us are uncovered," volunteered our guide, whose keen sense of hearing was vastly superior to our own, and its accuracy was again proved fully, for, pushing aside the undergrowth which hindered his path, there stepped out upon the level track before us a singularly well-formed being, whose whole appearance was that of a man in his primitive, savage state. He was fully six feet in height, and wonderfully erect, his nut-brown skin forming a warm setting for the rich, dark eyes which so distinguish Eastern races. His black hair clustered thickly above his forehead, on which we observed a circular spot, crimson in colour, and much resembling the *pottu* which Shiva women daily paint above their brows as a religious emblem. As Hassan had already said, the man's feet were bare of covering, while the single garment which he wore was a brightly spotted panther skin, which passed over the left shoulder to the right side, and then hung down carelessly to the knees. In one hand he carried a stout bow, and the band which crossed his body over the right shoulder supported a quiver which hung gracefully behind. A savage, and in such a rude garb, the man seemed almost grand in his very simplicity.

"A DHAH!"

"A Dhah!" exclaimed Hassan, quietly.

"We have, indeed, met with good fortune." Again we heard the brushwood crackle, and a second man, resembling the first in appearance and dress, came forward, and together they held a conversation, interspersed largely with the gestures which play so prominent a part in the language of barbaric tribes.

"What can they be searching for?" Denviers asked Hassan, as the men seemed to be closely examining the trunks of several of the palm trees.

"I cannot tell, sahib," responded the Arab. Then he continued with a warning movement:—

"Hist! there are others coming, and they are bearing loads with them." Through the brushwood we next saw several Dhahs advance, each carrying upon his head a huge bundle of some twining plant belonging to a species which we had not observed hitherto during our wanderings in Ceylon. From its appearance we likened it to a giant convolvulus, for, while the pliant stem was as thick as a man's arm, there hung from it huge leaves and petals resembling that flower in shape. We moved cautiously into the undergrowth behind, thus getting a little farther away from the Dhahs, and, lying with our bodies stretched upon the ground at full length, we supported our heads upon our hands and narrowly watched the scene before us.

Following the commands of the Dhah whom we had first seen, one of the others deftly threw upwards a long coil of the climbing plant, which, on reaching a part of the trunk of one of the palm trees some distance above his head, twined round the stem. The rope-like plant was then fastened to another palm tree some little distance in front of the first, and lower down. Continuing this process in all directions we saw them construct before our astonished eyes a wonderful tent, the leafy green roof and sides of which glowed with a massy setting of white and crimson flowers. The front almost faced us, so that the interior of the tent was disclosed to our view, and then this strange tribe next placed within the tent a number of rich skins of various animals killed in the chase, the whole effect being viewed with satisfaction by the Dhahs when at last their labour was finished.

"What a curious tent!" Denviers exclaimed. "These Dhahs are indeed a strange people."

Just as he spoke a messenger came to them through the brushwood, whereupon the men who had constructed the tent threw themselves down on either side of it. Within a few minutes we heard the sound of a number of footsteps approaching, and then a band of Dhahs stepped out from the brushwood through which the first had come, and joined those resting by the tent. Following these, we next saw a number of others, who ranged themselves before the men in a standing posture, and as they did so we judged from their attire that they were women

Their raven hair was loosely twisted and threaded with pearls, while pendants of the latter hung from their ears. The garb which covered their forms was made of similar skins to those which the men wore, but more elaborately wrought, in addition to being gathered at the waist by a glittering belt made of the plumage of beautiful birds. Here and there a dark-eyed and lightly-clad child could be seen standing among the women. From time to time the glances of the Dhahs were turned in the direction whence they had entered the forest clearing, and the sound of their voices then ceased. They were evidently expecting someone, and we, remembering the strange rumour as to the nationality of their queen, began to watch the brushwood with considerable interest, being anxious to see her as soon as she emerged. That some event of unusual moment was about to take place upon her arrival we felt sure, from the disappointed looks which overspread the Dhahs' faces each time that their expectation of her coming was not realized.

"What do you think is about to happen?" I whispered to Denviers, as we kept quite still, fearing lest our presence should be discovered.

"Something strange, no doubt," he responded, "for I notice that the crimson mark which we saw upon the men's foreheads also adorns those of the women, and seems to have been recently placed there." Here Hassan interposed, in his usually clear, grave tone:—

"It is very rarely, indeed, sahibs, that the Dhahs have been seen wandering on the borders of the forest, for they usually keep within the wild and pathless interior; so, at least, your slave heard in Kandi."

"Well," I added, "we certainly have much to be thankful for, since there is every chance of our remaining here unobserved, and witnessing whatever ceremony is about to take place. The sun has not long set, and yet the moon is up already. The network of branches above us keeps out its light to some extent; still we shall be able to see clearly what transpires."

"It will be unlucky for us if these Dhahs happen to discover our whereabouts," said Denviers, "for a shower of arrows shot from their stout bows towards us would make our present position anything but a pleasant one."

"They will not see us, sahib," continued Hassan, "unless we incautiously make some noise if anything unusual happens. They are not likely to cast many searching glances into the shadows which the trees cast, for they are apparently preoccupied, if we may judge from the excitement which they are evidently trying to suppress. We certainly must remain perfectly still when the queen appears, for thus only shall we see without being seen ourselves."

"That is easy enough to say, Hassan," I replied; "but in such a moment as that which faces us, we may easily forget to be cautious."

"Don't you think it would be a good plan if we were to separate a little from each other?" asked Denviers. Our guide seemed strongly in favour of this plan, and while I remained in the position which had been occupied hitherto, Denviers moved a few yards to the right, and Hassan about the same distance to the left of me. The latter, however, found his new position would readily expose him to observation, and when he had communicated this fact to me by signs, I beckoned to him to return to my side, which he did. Denviers, however, remained where he had gone, and this circumstance, slight as it was, led a little later on to a most unexpected result. The silence which just before we had observed among the Dhahs occurred again, and watching narrowly the brushwood we saw emerge from it the one whom they were eagerly expecting. As our eyes rested upon this last comer we were indeed startled, for before us was the Queen of the Dhahs, and we recognised in that moment that the rumour concerning her was true!

II.

"SHE comes! Margarita!" burst from the lips of every assembled Dhah, as the queen slowly advanced and passed between her subjects, who lined the path leading to the tent. As she moved amid them they bent low, while here and there a warrior Dhah pressed with his lips her trailing garment as she passed. Reaching the tent the queen turned and faced the excited throng of subjects grouped round it, and then we saw more distinctly her features and the attire which she wore.

The age of the queen was apparently less than twenty, her clear, fair skin forcibly contrasting with the dark complexion of her subjects, whom she alone resembled in the colour of the soft, full eyes with which she glanced upon them. A look almost of sadness overshadowed her face, which all the adulation which she received from her subjects could not entirely banish. Her form, which was above the medium height, was clad in a flowing robe of a wonderfully soft and silky-looking material, woven possibly, we thought, from the inner bark of some tree. Its loose folds were bare of ornament, save that the queen wore a girdle over it thickly interwoven with pearls as white as those of Manaar, of which a profuse number also braided her light flowing hair, meshes of which partly concealed her forehead. When the queen stood in silence before her subjects, after the greeting which they had given her subsided, there

"PROSTRATING HIMSELF BEFORE HER."

issued from among the Dhahs that one whom first we saw in the forest. Prostrating himself before her he afterwards rose, and, having bent low his head, began :—

"Margarita, white queen of the dusky race whose habitation is the pathless forest, hail! Here, upon the border which limits thy domains, we pledge anew to thee the promise of fealty, of which the crimson star upon our foreheads is the token By it we swear to thee that thy foes shall be our foes, and that over us, thy slaves, shalt thou have the power of life and death." Then, turning to the Dhahs, who throughout this speech had maintained a death-like silence, he asked :—

"Swear ye this by the crimson star of blood which is placed upon your brows?"

The last word had scarcely left his lips when the subject Dhahs rose and, placing upon their foreheads their left hands, held aloft the right above their heads as they cried :—

"By the crimson tide, which rules the life of man, we swear!"

We watched the strange scene intently as each of the Dhahs, in turn, came forward and fell prostrate before the queen, then gave place to those who followed. The Dhah who had administered the oath remained near the queen until the ceremony was concluded, and seemed to number the subjects as they came forward. Then he fell before her and, for a second time, kissed the hem of her robe. Smiling gravely upon him, the queen extended to him her hand. Pressing his lips fervently upon it he rose, then, turning to those around, he exclaimed :—

"All have not sworn fealty. One among us has not taken the oath, and at sundown he did not bear upon his forehead the sacred mark!" There was an ominous frown apparent upon the brows of the Dhahs as these words were uttered, and when he added : "Ye know the penalty which such transgression deserves; how then judge ye?" each man's hand gripped his bow in a threatening manner, while even the faces of the women grew terribly stern. By one of those assembled was uttered a cry which leapt from lip to lip, for it was immediately caught up by all :—

"Death to the false one! Death when the day shall dawn!" A gleam of satisfaction, one almost of savage joy, passed over the face of the Dhah who stood beside the queen as he added :—

"The sentence upon the traitor is a just one; do thou then confirm it!" He turned as if about to seek himself for the one who was the cause of the tumult, when the momentary silence was strangely broken. Upon our ears was borne the sharp whizz of an arrow shot true from a tightly-strung bow; then the Dhah who had just finished speaking, with a wild cry that pierced the forest, threw his arms up as if grasping the empty air, and fell dead at the queen's feet!

"THE DHAH FELL DEAD."

"Look yonder, sahib!" whispered Hassan, who was still beside me, "there is the one who sent forth the deadly shaft!" I turned my gaze hastily in the direction which the Arab indicated, and saw Denviers struggling with a fierce Dhah from whose hands he was trying to wrest a bow, and who had hidden in the brushwood near him without being observed hitherto! They were seen in a moment by the assembled Dhahs, and, with a wild rush, the latter poured down upon the combatants, seizing them as they still grasped the bow.

"Hassan," I cried to our guide, "come on, we must get Denviers out of the hands of this horde somehow!" We dashed across the intervening space, and made a brief but desperate attempt to release our companion. It was as useless as it was rash, for we were

directly afterwards dragged, in spite of our struggles—as well as Denviers and his opponent—into the open glade, close to the dead body of the man lying there.

"We are betrayed!" cried one of the Dhahs. "The white spies have been led hither by the traitor among us that they may learn our strength, and then return with a force to destroy us! One of our number has already fallen; shall we not slay the captives over his dead body?" A fierce cry of assent rose from the others, as they fitted each a shaft to their bows and took deliberate aim at us as we were held fast by our captors. I saw the face of the queen grow pale as she rested her eyes, first upon the fallen Dhah and then upon us. Had men of her own race come that they might destroy the tribe which obeyed her slightest word? She made an imperative gesture, which caused the Dhahs to hold their arrows undischarged, though they still kept their bows bent, waiting eagerly for her to utter the word of command to slay us.

"Stop!" she cried, in a commanding tone. "Upon your foreheads ye wear still the pledge of obedience to me, with whom rests alone the power of life and death. Ye shall have justice to the full: I will hear what they can say in their defence, but if wantonly they have caused life to be taken, white though they be, I swear unto ye that they shall surely die." The Dhahs shifted their arrows from the bowstrings and seemed reluctant to give us even this short respite. I looked into the queen's face and read there that her threat against us was no idle one. She commanded the women and most of the men to retire—leaving us still held fast by our captors.

"We are not cowards," said Denviers, calmly, to her. "Hear what we have to say, and then decide our fate. Bid these savages release us from their grasp—we shall make no attempt to escape, I pledge my word." The queen glanced coldly at him as she responded:

"Be it as ye say." Then, turning to the Dhahs, she continued: "Take them within the tent, and then retire. Remain within an arrow shot from here, and if ye see one of the prisoners attempt to escape, slay him and spare not." We were conducted into the queen's tent, and there released. As the Dhahs withdrew Denviers turned to Hassan, and said:—

"Bid this savage who shot the arrow explain that we know nothing of him." The queen looked sharply at us, and then pointing to Hassan, asked:—

"Who is this whom ye have brought into the forest?"

I answered for us, saying: "He is our guide, with whom we have been wandering for some time. Why do you mistrust us, since you have ample proof that the fallen Dhah was shot by your own subject there?" and I pointed to the man, who, for a moment, had thrown himself down in the tent.

"Speak!" she commanded him. "Why did you shoot forth the winged messenger of death?"

To our surprise the man rose and confronted her boldly, as he answered:—

"Am I not a warrior? Can I not bend the bow and endure hardships better than anyone among the tribe over which thou rulest? Was not I prince of these Dhahs until the day when thou tookest possession of my right? Thou hast despised me and looked kindly upon another, wherefore have I sworn to refuse to take the pledge of fealty to thee when the time came round, and to stretch him dead at thy feet. Deliver me into the hands of the tribe if thou wilt, but thou art powerless to bring back life to thy favourite!" He stopped and drew himself up defiantly before her. The eyes of the imperious queen shone brightly with the fierce resentment which the Dhah's words roused in her.

"Darest thou then to confront thy queen so?" she asked, scornfully. "May not I choose whom I will upon whom to bestow my favours? Coward that thou art to shoot the shaft secretly, because thou darest not face thine enemy as a brave Dhah ever does! Thy crime has nearly cost these other prisoners dear; and I, ruling as I do this tribe without the exterminating feuds which distinguished it under thy misgovernment, doom thee to death. At sundown to-morrow shalt thou die; till then thou shalt live, scorned by the race upon which thou hast brought this stain." She moved to the front of the tent, and then we saw the Dhah dragged away by those whom the queen quickly summoned.

We were bidden to rest ourselves upon the piles of soft, rich skins which were spread there, and having promised to secure our safety, the queen, whose anger gradually subsided, observing the inquiring glances which we turned towards her, said, in a low tone:—

"The deed which ye have seen enacted to-night has smitten me sorely. For ten years have I lived among these Dhahs, for to-day is the anniversary of that upon which I

TO-MORROW SHALT THOU DIE!"

came to them, and so it is that ye chance to see their promise to obey me renewed. To-morrow it is expected that I, too, will take in turn the oath, by which yearly I have sworn to them to remain in this forest until the seasons change and change again. At midnight to-night my last promise expires, and for a few brief hours I shall not be their bond queen. By your glances I judge that ye would learn my history. Strange as it is, I must narrate it briefly, for, because of the death which ye have witnessed, I now have a request to make which may sound unusual upon your ears."

III.

THE dark eyes of the queen glanced at us as she began her story, the sequel to which we did not at all anticipate:—

"I was a mere child when it chanced that I strayed from the hut which my English parents inhabited on the borders of this forest. Of them I know nothing. I remember the cry of surprise which came from the lips of a Dhah woman when she found me, and then carried me among her tribeswomen to show to them. It is forbidden among us for a Dhah to ever pass beyond the limits of this forest, and so it transpired that, knowing nothing of other races, they were astonished at my strange whiteness. I have heard that at first they contemplated my death, thinking that my presence would bring dire misfortune upon them. The woman who found me averred, on the contrary, that my appearance betokened great advantages to the tribe, as I was sent to dwell in the forest as a goddess. Afterwards, believing this, they paid me the most abject worship for years. When I grew older I longed to escape, but they were determined that I should not do so, and compelled me to take an oath to stay with them for a year, which I have renewed as often as the promise expired. Finding that I disliked the adoration which they paid to me, they deposed their prince—he whose hand shot the fatal arrow, as, alas! ye saw—and although for a time I refused to accept the position, I was eventually made their queen—even as I am now.

"Many times I desired to leave them, but of late that wish has grown feeble, for he, whom ye know now lies lifeless before the tent, bent his dark eyes, and looked into mine, which returned his glances. One day I thought to raise him even as a prince to my side, for all the tribe trusted in him as much as they disliked the one deposed. Now that he is slain, the wish to depart has again re-entered my breast, and ye, who are of the same kindred as I, surely ye will aid me? How came ye hither, on foot or otherwise?"

"We left our horses on the edge of the forest," said Denviers, "but we did not expect to be so long absent from them. How wilt thou depart from these Dhahs? Surely they will avenge themselves upon us, for they will assuredly think that we have influenced you to desert them." The queen paused for a minute, then answered:—

"I could not bear to leave them openly, for I have grown to be almost one of themselves, and they are dear indeed to me. I will accompany ye to where your horses are tethered; and waiting there for me I will come to ye again upon the steed which has never known saddle."

The plan of escape seemed simple enough, but the slightest mishap might bring us into conflict with the whole tribe of the

Dhahs, who would doubtless be infuriated if they thought that their queen was lost to them through us, as Denviers had suggested. It seemed to us a strange termination to our adventure, but in obedience to a gesture from the queen we rose, and, accompanied by her, passed the guards in safety. As she emerged from the tent, the queen bade us wait for her for a minute, and stopping, we saw the woman bend down sadly over the silent form lying there under the trees, which half shut out the midnight sky. Her hand touched the arrow and gently drew it forth—tipped with blood! Then placing it within the upper folds of her dress she passed silently on through the clearing, and so accompanied us to the spot where our horses were, whence she departed.

HER HAND TOUCHED THE ARROW."

"I am afraid that this affair may yet turn out badly for us," I remarked to Denviers, as we untethered our steeds and waited for the queen's return. "Where shall we make for when we start?"

"For the hut of the Cingalese, which we left some time ago," he responded. "It will afford her some shelter, and we can keep watch outside."

He had scarcely finished speaking when we saw the queen riding towards us upon a snow-white steed. As the moonlight touched her spotless robe and her floating hair, with the pearls which adorned it, she seemed to us to be more like some vision than a living reality. I had just time to notice that she now carried the weapon of the tribe over which she had so long ruled—a bow—and that across her fair shoulders was slung a quiver of arrows, when a sudden cry rose from the forest, and at the same moment Hassan exclaimed:—

"Quick, sahibs! The Dhahs are upon us!"

We leapt upon our horses and dashed away from the forest just as a heavy shower of arrows narrowly missed us. Hassan went on in front, while Denviers and I galloped on either side of the queen. Glancing back at the Dhahs I observed that they were massed already upon the margin of the forest, the flight of their queen having become rapidly known. The women raised a mournful and appealing cry of entreaty to her to go back to them, and, glancing at the queen, I saw that her face was wet with tears. We heard the hoarse shouts of the warrior Dhahs when they found that their arrows fell short, but they did not dare to pass the limits of the forest beyond which their strange law forbade them to go. We rode on for some hours at a rapid rate, then, on nearing the hut of the Cingalese, Denviers leapt down and succeeded in awaking its sole occupant, who was induced to vacate it. The queen dismounted and entered the hut wearied, as we thought, with the long ride, for the dawn had come before we finished our journey. Hassan secured the horses, and soon after we were all lying at a little distance from the hut fast asleep in the shade of some giant ferns.

The morning was far advanced when we awoke, but hour after hour passed and the door of the hut remained closed. Becoming uneasy, at last I ventured to open it. The queen had disappeared!

"Denviers!" I shouted. "Come here a minute!" My companion hastened towards the hut, and was considerably surprised to find it empty. Glancing round it we saw against one of its thin palm leaf sides an arrow projecting. Going close to it we found roughly scratched beneath it a message to us, which said simply:—

"*The Queen of the Dhahs could not rest away from her people and the forest where lies her dead lover!*" We stared at the writing incredulously for a minute or two, then a sudden thought occurred to me:—

"Hassan!" I shouted, "see to the horses." The Arab went slowly to the spot where he had secured them, but hastily returned saying, in an animated tone, somewhat unusual for him unless when excited:—

"Sahibs, the white steed is no longer there!" and he looked gravely at us as he spoke.

"Well," said Denviers, as Hassan finished speaking, "this has been a strange adventure from beginning to end. How could such a woman care to spend her existence with those Dhahs? It seemed curious to me at the first, but after seeing her and observing the contrast between her and her subjects, I am still more surprised."

"The Dhahs are known throughout Ceylon," interposed Hassan, "for the honour which they pay to their queen, and that may influence her to remain with them; besides, they are a handsome race, very different to such as this man," and he pointed to the Cingalese, who was again vacantly staring at his plantation of palm trees.

"What do you think will become of the man who shot the Dhah, sahib?" asked Hassan, as he turned to Denviers. My companion was silent for a moment, then responded:—

"I really cannot say. He is doomed to die at sundown to-day, but I daresay someone will intercede for him with the queen." Then, holding out towards the Arab the arrow which we had found within the hut, he continued:—

"Take care of that, Hassan, for if we are able I should like to keep it as a memento of this event." The Arab examined it closely to see what constituted its value, and Denviers, thinking that it might disappear like sundry other lost treasures of ours, added: "It is a poisoned arrow, and if put in that sash of yours might prove very dangerous." Hassan understood the hint, as subsequent events proved, and, calling upon Mahomet as a witness to his integrity under such trying circumstances, carried it cautiously away and placed it among our baggage.

Shafts from an Eastern Quiver.

VIII.—THE MASKED RULER OF THE BLACK WRECKERS.

By Charles J. Mansford, B.A.

I.

"HASSAN," called Denviers to our guide in an imperative tone, as the latter was looking longingly at the wide expanse of sea over which our boat was helplessly drifting, "lie down yonder immediately!" The Arab rose slowly and reluctantly, and then extended himself at the bottom of the boat out of sight of the tempting waters.

"How much longer are these torments to last, Frank?" I asked wearily, as I looked into the gaunt, haggard face of my companion as we sat in the prow of our frail craft and gazed anxiously but almost hopelessly onward to see if land might even yet loom up in the distance.

"Can't say, Harold," he responded; "but I think we can hold out for two more days, and surely by that time we shall either reach some island or else be rescued by a passing vessel." Two more days—forty-eight more hours of this burning heat and thirst! I glanced most uneasily at our guide as he lay impassively in the boat, then I continued:—

"Do you think that Hassan will be able to resist the temptation of these maddening waters round us for so long as that?" There was a serious look which crossed Denviers' face as he quietly replied:—

"I hope so, Harold; we are doing our best for him. The Arab gets a double share now of our pitifully slender stock, although, happily, he doesn't know it; if he did he would certainly refuse to take his dole of rice and scanty draught of water, and then I'm afraid that it would be all over with him. He bears up bravely enough, but I don't at all like the bright look in his eyes which has been there for the last few hours. We must have travelled now more than half way across the Bay of Bengal with such a driving wind as this behind us. It's certainly lucky for us that our valuables were not on board the other boat, for we shall never see that again, nor its cowardly occupants. The horses, our tent, and some of our weapons are, of course, gone altogether, but we shall be able to shift for ourselves well enough if once we are so lucky as to reach land again."

"HELPLESSLY DRIFTING."

"I can't see of what use any weapons are just at present," I responded, "nor, for the matter of that, the gems which we have hidden about our persons. For the whole five days during which we have been driven on by this fierce, howling wind I have not

seen a living thing except ourselves—not even a bird of the smallest size."

"Because they know more about these storms than we do, and make for the land accordingly," said Denviers; then glancing again at the Arab, he continued:—

"We must watch Hassan very closely, and if he shows signs of being at all likely to lose his self-control, we shall have to tie him down. We owe a great deal to him in this present difficulty, because it was entirely through his advice that we brought any provisions with us at all."

"That is true enough," I replied; "but how were we to know that a journey which we expected would occupy less than six hours was to end in our being cast adrift at the mercy of wind and wave in such a mere cockle-shell as this boat is, and so driven sheer across this waste of waters?"

"Well, Harold," said Denviers, quietly, "we must stick to our original plan of resting turn and turn about if we wish to keep ourselves alive as long as possible. I will continue my watch from the prow, and meantime you had better endeavour to obtain some rest; at all events we won't give in just yet." He turned his head away from me as he spoke and narrowly surveyed the scene around us, magnificent as it was, notwithstanding its solitude and the perils which darkly threatened us.

Leaving the hut of the Cingalese after our adventure with the Dhahs in the forest of Ceylon, we had made our way to Trincomalee, where we had embarked upon a small sailing boat, similar in size and shape to those which may be constantly seen on the other side of the island, and which are used by the pearl-divers. We had heard of some wonderful sea-worn caves, which were to be seen on the rocky coast at some distance from Trincomalee, and had thus set out, intending afterwards to land on a more southerly portion of the island—for we had determined to traverse the coast, and, returning to Colombo again, to take ship for Burmah. Our possessions were placed in a second boat, which had a planked covering of a rounded form, beneath which they were secured from the dashing spray affecting them. We had scarcely got out for about an hour's distance when the natives stolidly refused to proceed farther, declaring that a violent storm was about to burst upon us. We, however, insisted on continuing our journey, when those in the second boat suddenly turned its prow round and made hastily for the land, at the same time that our own boatman dived from the side and dexterously clambered up on the retreating boat, leaving us to shift for ourselves as best we could. Their fears were only too well grounded, for before we were able to make an attempt to follow them as they coolly made off with our property in the boat, the wind struck our own little boat heavily, and out to sea we went, driven through the rapidly rising waves in spite of our efforts to render the boat manageable.

For five days we had now been whirled violently along; a little water and a few handfuls of rice being all that we had to share between the three of us who occupied the boat, and upon whom the sun each day beat fiercely down in a white heat, increasing our sufferings ten-fold—the effects of which could be seen plainly enough as we looked into each other's faces.

Behind us the sun had just set in a sky that the waves seemed to meet in the distance, and to be blended with them into one vast purple and crimson heaving mass. Round us and before us, the waters curled up into giant waves, which flung high into the air ridges of white foam and then fell sheer down into a yawning gulf, only to rise again nearer and nearer to the quivering sides of our frail craft, which still pressed on—on to where we expected to meet with death rather than rescue, as we saw the ripped sail dip itself into the seething waters like the wing of a wounded sea-bird.

Following my companion's suggestion I lay down and closed my eyes, and was so much exhausted, indeed, that before long I fell into a restless sleep, from which I at last awoke to hear Denviers speaking to me as he shook my arm gently to arouse me.

"Harold," he said, in a subdued tone, "I want you to see whether I am deceiving myself or not. Come to the prow of the boat and tell me what you can see from there."

I rose slowly, and as I did so gave a glance at the Arab, who was lying quite still in the bottom of the boat, where Denviers had commanded him to rest some hours before. Then, following the direction in which my companion pointed, I looked far out across the waves. The storm had abated considerably in the hours during which I had slept, for the waters which stretched round us were becoming as still as the starlit sky above. Looking carefully ahead of us, I thought that in the distance I could discern the faint flicker of a flame, and accordingly pointed it out to Denviers.

"Then I am not mistaken," he exclaimed. "I have been watching it for some time, and as the waves have become less violent, it seemed to shine out; but I was afraid that after all I might be deluding myself by raising such a hope of assistance, for, as you know, our guide Hassan has been seeing land all day, which, unfortunately for us, only existed in his imagination."

"He is asleep," I responded; "we will watch this light together, and when we get near to it, then he can be awakened if necessary." We slowly drew closer and closer to the flame, and then we thought that we could discern before us the mast of a vessel, from which the light seemed to be hung out into the air. At last we were sufficiently near to clearly distinguish the mast, which was evidently rising from out of the sea, for the hull of the vessel was not apparent to us, even when we were cast close to it.

"A wreck!" cried Denviers, leaning over the prow of our boat. "We were not the only ones who suffered from the effects of the driving storm." Then pointing a little to the east of the mast, he continued:—

"There is land at last, for the tops of several trees are plainly to be seen." I looked eastward as he spoke, and then back again to the mast of the vessel.

"We have been seen by those clinging yonder," I exclaimed. "There is a man evidently signalling to us to save him." Denviers scanned the mast before us, and replied:-

"There is only one man clinging there, Harold. What a strange being he is—look!" Clinging to the rigging with one hand, a man, who was perfectly black and almost clothless, could be seen holding aloft towards us a blazing torch, the glare of which fell full upon his face.

"We must save him," said Denviers, "but I'm afraid there will be some difficulty in doing so. Wake Hassan as quickly as you can." I roused the Arab, and when he scanned the face and form of the apparently wrecked man he said, in a puzzled tone:—

"Sahibs, the man looks like a Papuan, but we are far too distant from their land for that to be so."

"The mast and ropes seem to me to be very much weather-beaten," I interposed, as the light showed them clearly. "Why, the wreck is an old one!"

"Jump!" cried Denviers, at that moment, to the man clinging to the rigging, just as the waters, with a swirl, sent us past the ship. The watcher flung his blazing torch into the waves, and the hiss of the brand was followed by a splash in the sea. The holder of it had dived from the rigging and directly after reappeared and clambered into our boat, saved from death, as we thought—little knowing the fell purpose for which he had been stationed to hold out the flaring torch as a welcoming beacon to be seen afar by any vessel in distress. I glanced at the dangerous ring of coral reef round the island on which the ship had once struck, and then looked at the repulsive islander, who sat gazing at us with a savage leer. Although somewhat resembling a Papuan, as Hassan had said, we were soon destined to know what he really was, for the Arab, who had been glancing narrowly and suspiciously at the man, whispered to us cautiously:—

A STRANGE BEING.

"Sahibs, trust not this islander. We must have reached the land where the Tamils dwell. They have a sinister reputation, which even your slave has heard. This savage is one of those who lure ships on to the coral reefs, and of whom dark stories are told. He is a black wrecker!"

II.

We managed by means of Hassan to communicate to the man who was with us in the boat that we were desperately in need of food, to which he made some unintelligible response. Hassan pressed the question upon him again, and then he volunteered to take our boat through the dangerous reefs which were distinguishable in the clear waters, and to conduct us to the shore of the island, which we saw was beautifully wooded. He managed the boat with considerable skill, and when at last we found ourselves upon land once again, we began to think that, perhaps, after all, the natives might be friendly disposed towards us.

Our new-found guide entered a slight crevice in the limestone rock, and came forth armed with a stout spear tipped, as we afterwards found, with a shark's tooth.

"I suppose we must trust to fortune," said Denviers, as we carefully followed the black in single file over a surface which seemed to be covered with a mass of holes.

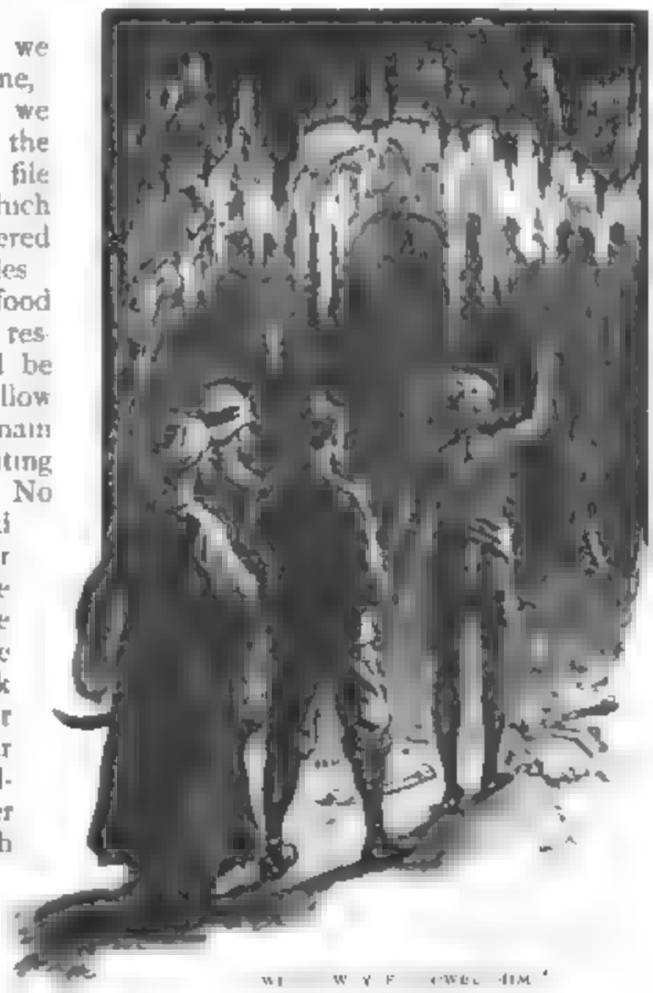
"We must get food somehow," I responded. "It will be just as safe to follow this Tamil as to remain on the shore waiting for daybreak. No doubt, if we did so the news of our arrival would be taken to the tribe and an attack made upon us. Thank goodness, our pistols are in our belts after all, although our other weapons went with the rest of the things which we lost."

The ground which we were traversing now began to assume more the appearance of a zigzag pathway, leading steeply downward, however, for we could see it as it twisted far below us, and apparently led into a plain. The Tamil who was leading the way seemed to purposely avoid any conversation with us, and Denviers catching up to him grasped him by the shoulder. The savage stopped suddenly and shortened his hold upon the spear, while his face glowed with all the fury of his fierce nature.

"Where does this path lead to?" Denviers asked, making a motion towards it to explain the information which he desired to obtain. Hassan hurried up and explained the words which were returned in a guttural tone:

"To where the food for which ye asked may be obtained."

The path now began to widen out, and we found ourselves, on passing over the plain which we had seen from above, entering a vast grotto from the roof of which long crystal prisms hung, while here and there natural pillars of limestone seemed to give their support to the roof above. Our strange guide now fastened a torch of some resinous material to the butt end of his spear and held it high above us as we slowly followed him, keeping close to each other so as to avoid being taken by surprise.



"WE WERE SOON WELCOMED."

The floor of this grotto was strewn with the bones of some animal, and soon we discovered that we were entering the haunt of the Tamil tribe. From the far end of the grotto we heard the sound of voices, and as we approached saw the gleam of a wood fire lighting up the scene before us. Round this were gathered a number of the tribe to which the man belonged, their spears resting in their hands as though they were ever watchful and ready to make an attack. Uttering a peculiar bird-like cry, the savage thus apprised

the others of our approach, whereupon they hastily rose from the fire and spread out so that on our nearing them we were immediately surrounded.

"Hassan," said Denviers, "tell these grinning niggers that we mean to go no farther until they have provided us with food."

The Arab managed to make himself understood, for the savage who had led us into the snare pointed to one of the caverns which ran off from the main grotto, and said:—

"Sports of the ocean current, which brought ye into the way whence ye may see the Great Tamil, enter there and food shall be given to ye."

We entered the place pointed out with considerable misgivings, for we had not forgotten the plot of the Hindu fakir. We could see very little of its interior, which was only partly lighted by the torch which the Tamil still carried affixed to his spear. He left us there for a few minutes, during which we rested on the limestone floor, and, being unable to distinguish any part of the cavern around us, we watched the entry closely, fearing attack. The shadows of many spears were flung before us by the torch, and, concluding that we were being carefully guarded, we decided to await quietly the Tamil's return. The much-needed food was at length brought to us, and consisted of charred fragments of fish, in addition to some fruit, which served us instead of water, for none of the last was given to us. The savage contemptuously threw what he had brought at our feet, and then departed. Being anxious to escape, we ventured to approach again the entrance of the cavern, but found ourselves immediately confronted by a dozen blacks, who held their spears in a threatening manner as they glared fiercely at us, and uttered a warning exclamation.

"Back to the cave!" they cried, and thinking that it would be unwise for us to endeavour to fight our way through them till day dawned, we returned reluctantly, and threw ourselves down where we had rested before. After some time, the Tamil who evidently looked upon us as his own prisoners entered the cavern, and with a shrill laugh motioned to us to follow him. We rose, and re-entering the grotto, were led by the savage through it, until at last we stood confronting a being at whom we gazed in amazement for some few minutes.

Impassive and motionless, the one whom we faced rested upon a curiously carved throne of state. One hand of the monarch held a spear, the butt end of which rested upon the ground, while the other hung rigidly to his side. But the glare which came from the torches which several of the Tamils had affixed to their spears revealed to us no view of the face of the one sitting there, for, over it, to prevent this, was a hideous mask, somewhat similar to that which exorcists wear in many Eastern countries. The nose was perfectly flat, from the sides of the head large ears protruded, huge tusks took the place of teeth, while the leering eyes were made of some reddish, glassy substance, the entire mask presenting a most repulsive appearance, being evidently intended to strike terror into those who beheld it. The strangest part of the scene was that one of the Tamils stood close by the side of the masked monarch, and seemed to act as interpreter, for the ruler never spoke, although the questions put by his subject soon convinced us that we were likely to have to fight our way out of the power of the savage horde.

"The Great Tamil would know why ye dared to land upon his sacred shores?" the fierce interpreter asked us. Denviers turned to Hassan, and said:—

"Tell the Great Tamil who hides his ugly face behind this mask that his treacherous subject brought us, and that we want to leave his shores as soon as we can." Hassan responded to the question, then the savage asked:—

"Will ye present your belts and weapons to the Great Tamil as a peace offering?" We looked at the savage in surprise for a moment, wondering if he shrewdly guessed that we had anything valuable concealed there. We soon conjectured rightly that this was only a ruse on his part to disarm us, and Hassan was instructed to say that we never gave away our weapons or belts to friends or foes.

"Then the Great Tamil orders that ye be imprisoned in the cavern from which ye have come into his presence until ye fulfil his command," said the one who was apparently employed as interpreter to the motionless ruler. We signified our readiness to return to the cave, for we thought that if attacked there we should have enemies only in front of us, whereas at that moment we were entirely surrounded. The fierce guards as they conducted us back endeavoured to incite us to an attack, for they several times viciously struck us with the butts of their spears, but, following Denviers' example, I managed to restrain my anger, waiting for a

"THE GREAT TAMIL."

good opportunity to amply repay them for the insult.

"What a strange ruler, Harold," said Denviers, as we found ourselves once more imprisoned within the cave.

"He made no attempt to speak," I responded; "at all events, I did not hear any words come from his lips. It looked like a piece of masquerading more than the interrogation of three prisoners. I wonder if there is any way of escaping out of this place other than by the entrance through which we came."

"We may as well try to find one," said Denviers, and accordingly we groped about the dim cave, running our hands over its roughened sides, but could discover no means of egress.

"We must take our chance, that is all," said my companion, when our efforts had proved unsuccessful. "I expect that they will make a strong attempt to disarm us, if nothing worse than that befalls us. These savages have a mania for getting possession of civilized weapons. One of our pistols would be to them a great treasure."

"Did you notice the bones which strewed the cavern when we entered?" I interrupted, for a strange thought occurred to me.

"Hush! Harold," Denviers whispered, as we reclined on the hard granite flooring of the cave. "I don't think Hassan observed them, and there is no need to let him know what we infer from them until we cannot prevent it. There is no reason why we should hide from each other the fact that these savages are evidently cannibals, which is in my opinion the reason why they lure vessels upon the reefs here. I noticed that several of them wore bracelets round their arms and ankles, taken no doubt from their victims. I should think that in a storm like the one which drove us hither, many vessels have drifted at times this way. We shall have to fight for our lives, that is pretty certain; I hope it will be in daylight, for as it is we should be impaled on their spears without having the satisfaction of first shooting a few of them."

"Sahibs," said Hassan, who had been resting at a little distance from us, "it will be best for us to seek repose in order to be fit for fighting, if necessary, when these savages demand our weapons."

"Well, Hassan," said Denviers, "you are better off than we are. True we have our pistols, but your sword has never left your side, and I dare say you will find plenty of use for it before long."

"If the Prophet so wills," said the Arab, "it will be at the service of the Englishmen. I rested for many hours on the boat before we reached this land, and will now keep watch lest any treachery be attempted by these Tamils." We knew that under the circumstances Hassan's keen sense of hearing would be more valuable than our own, and

after a slight protest agreed to leave him to his self-imposed task of watching while we slept. He moved close to the entrance of the cave, and we followed his example before seeking repose. Hassan made some further remark, to which I do not clearly remember responding, the next event recalled being that he awoke us from a sound sleep, saying:—

"Sahibs, the day has dawned, and the Tamils are evidently going to attack us." We rose to our feet and, assuring ourselves that our pistols were safe in our belts, we stood at the entrance of the cave and peered out. The Tamils were gathering round the spot, listening eagerly to the man who had first brought us into the grotto, and who was pointing at the cave in which we were and gesticulating wildly to his companions.

III.

THE savage bounded towards us as we appeared in the entry, and, grinning fiercely, showed his white, protruding teeth.

"The Great Tamil commands his prisoners to appear before him again," he cried. "He would fain learn something of the land whence they came." We looked into each other's faces irresolute for a minute. If we advanced from the cave we might be at once surrounded and slain, yet we were unable to tell how many of the Tamils held the way between us and the path down which we had come when entering the grotto.

"Tell him that we are ready to follow him," said Denviers to Hassan; then turning to me he whispered: "Harold, watch your chance when we are before this motionless nigger whom they call the Great Tamil. If I can devise a scheme I will endeavour to find a way to surprise them, and then we must make a dash for liberty." The Tamils, however, made no attempt to touch us as we passed out before them and followed the messenger sent to summon us to appear again before their monarch. The grotto was still gloomy, for the light of day did not penetrate well into it. We could, however, see clearly enough, and the being before whom we were brought a second time seemed more repulsive than ever. We noticed that the limbs of his subjects were tattooed with various designs as they stood round us and gazed in awe upon the silent form of their monarch.

"The Great Tamil would know whether ye have yet decided to give up your belts and weapons, that they may adorn his abode with the rest which he has accumulated," said the savage who stood by the monarch's spear, as he pointed to a part of the grotto where we saw a huge heap of what appeared to us to be the spoils of several wrecks. Our guide interpreted my companion's reply.

"We will not be disarmed," answered Denviers. "These are our weapons of defence; ye have your own spears, and they should be sufficient for your needs."

"Ye will not?" demanded the savage, fiercely.

"No!" responded Denviers, and he moved his right hand to the belt in which his pistols were.

"Seize them!" shrieked the impassioned savage; "they defy us. Drag them to the mortar and crush them into dust!" The words had scarcely passed his lips when Denviers rushed forward and snatched the

"DENVIERS RUSHED FORWARD."

mask from the Tamil sitting there! The savages around, when they saw this, seemed for a moment unable to move; then they threw themselves wildly to the ground and grovelled before the face which was thus revealed. The motionless arm of the form made no attempt to move from the side where it hung to protect the mask from Denviers' touch, for the rigid features upon which we looked at that moment were those of the dead!

"Quick, Harold!" exclaimed Denviers, as he saw the momentary panic which his action had caused among the superstitious Tamils. "On to the entry!" We bounded over the guards as they lay prostrate, and a moment afterwards were rushing headlong towards the entrance of the grotto. Our escape was by no means fully secured, however, for as we emerged we found several Tamils prepared to bar our further advance.

Denviers dashed his fist full in the face of one of the yelling savages, and in a moment got possession of the spear which he had poised, while the whirl of Hassan's blade cleared our path. I heard the whirr of a spear as it narrowly missed my head and pierced the ground before me. Wrenching it out of the hard ground I followed Hassan and Denviers as they darted up the zigzag path. On we went, the savages hotly pursuing us, then those in the van stopped until the others from the cave joined them, when they all made a mad rush together after us. Owing to the path zigzagging as it did, we were happily protected in a great measure from the shower of spears which fell around us.

We had nearly reached the top of the path when, turning round, I saw that our pursuers were only a few yards away, for the savages seemed to leap rather than to run over the ground, and certainly would leave us no chance to reach our boat and push off from them. Denviers saw them too, and cried to me:—

"Quick, Harold, lend Hassan and me a hand!" I saw that they had made for a huge piece of granite which was poised on a hollow, cup-like base, and directly afterwards the three of us were behind it straining with all our force to push it forward. The foremost savage had all but reached us when, with one desperate and successful attempt, we sent the monster stone crashing down upon the black, yelling horde!

We stopped and looked down at the havoc which had been wrought among them; then we pressed on, for we knew that our advantage was likely to be only of short duration, and that those who were uninjured would dash over their fallen comrades and follow us in order to avenge them. Almost immediately after we reached the spot where our boat was moored we saw one of our pursuers appear, eagerly searching for our whereabouts. We hastily set the sail to the breeze, which was blowing from the shore, while the savage wildly urged the others, who had now reached him, to dash into the water and spear us.

Holding their weapons between their teeth, fully twenty of the blacks plunged into the sea and made a determined effort to reach us. They swam splendidly, keeping their fierce eyes fixed upon us as they drew nearer and nearer.

"Shall we shoot them?" I asked Denviers, as we saw that they were within a short distance of us.

"We don't want to kill any more of these black man-eaters," he said; "but we must make an example of one of them, I suppose, or they will certainly spear us."

I watched the savage who was nearest to us. He reached the boat, and, holding on by one of his black paws, raised himself a little, then gripped his spear in the middle and drew it back. Denviers pointed his pistol full at the savage and fired. He bounded completely out of the water, then fell back lifeless among his companions! The death of one of their number so suddenly seemed to disconcert the rest, and before they could make another attack we were standing well out to sea. We saw them swim back to the shore and line it in a dark, threatening mass, brandishing their useless spears, until at last the rising waters hid the island from our view.

"A sharp brush with the niggers, indeed!" said Denviers. "The worst of it is that unless we are picked up before long by some vessel we must make for some part of the island again, for we must have food at any cost."

We had not been at sea, however, more than two hours afterwards when Hassan suddenly cried:

"Sahibs, a ship!"

Looking in the direction towards which he was turned we saw a vessel with all sails set. We started up, and before long our signals were seen, for a boat was lowered and we were taken on board.

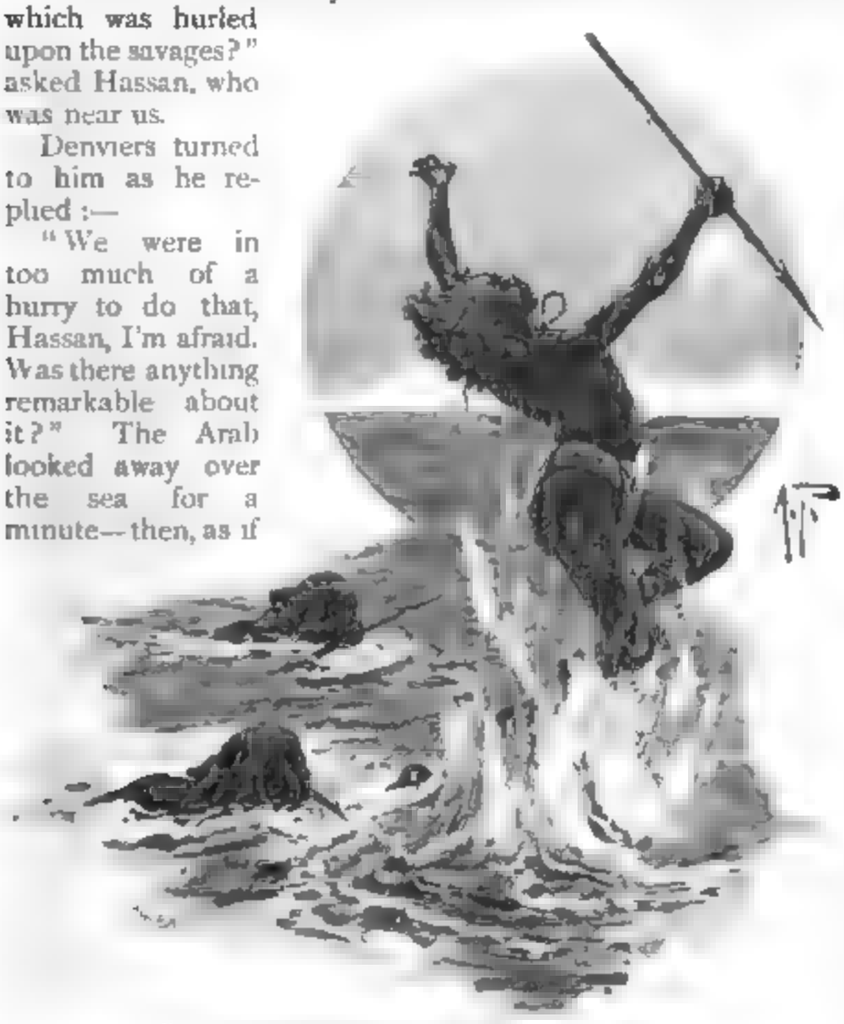
"Well, Harold," said Denviers, as we lay stretched on the deck that night, talking over our adventure, "strange to say we are bound for the country we wished to reach, although

we certainly started for it in a very unexpected way."

"Did the sahibs fully observe the stone which was hurled upon the savages?" asked Hassan, who was near us.

Denviers turned to him as he replied:—

"We were in too much of a hurry to do that, Hassan, I'm afraid. Was there anything remarkable about it?" The Arab looked away over the sea for a minute—then, as if talking to himself, he answered. "Great is Allah and his servant Mahomet, and strange the way in which he saved us. The huge stone which crushed the savages was the same with which they have destroyed their victims in the hollowed-out mortar in which it stood! I have once before seen such a stone, and the death to which they condemned us drew my attention to it as we pushed it down upon them."



"HE BOUNDED COMPLETELY OUT OF THE WATER."

"Then," said Denviers, "their strange monarch was not disappointed after all in his sentence being carried out—only it affected his own subjects."

"That," said Hassan, "is not an infrequent occurrence in the East; but so long as the proper number perishes, surely it matters little who complete it fully."

"A very pleasant view of the case, Hassan," said Denviers; "only we who live Westward will, I hope, be in no particular hurry to adopt such a custom; but go and see if you can find out where our berths are, for we want to turn in." The Arab obeyed, and returned in a few minutes, saying that he, the unworthy latchet of our shoes, had discovered them.

Shafts from an Eastern Quiver.

IX. MAW SAYAH: THE KEEPER OF THE GREAT BURMAN NAT

By Charles J. Mansford, B.A.

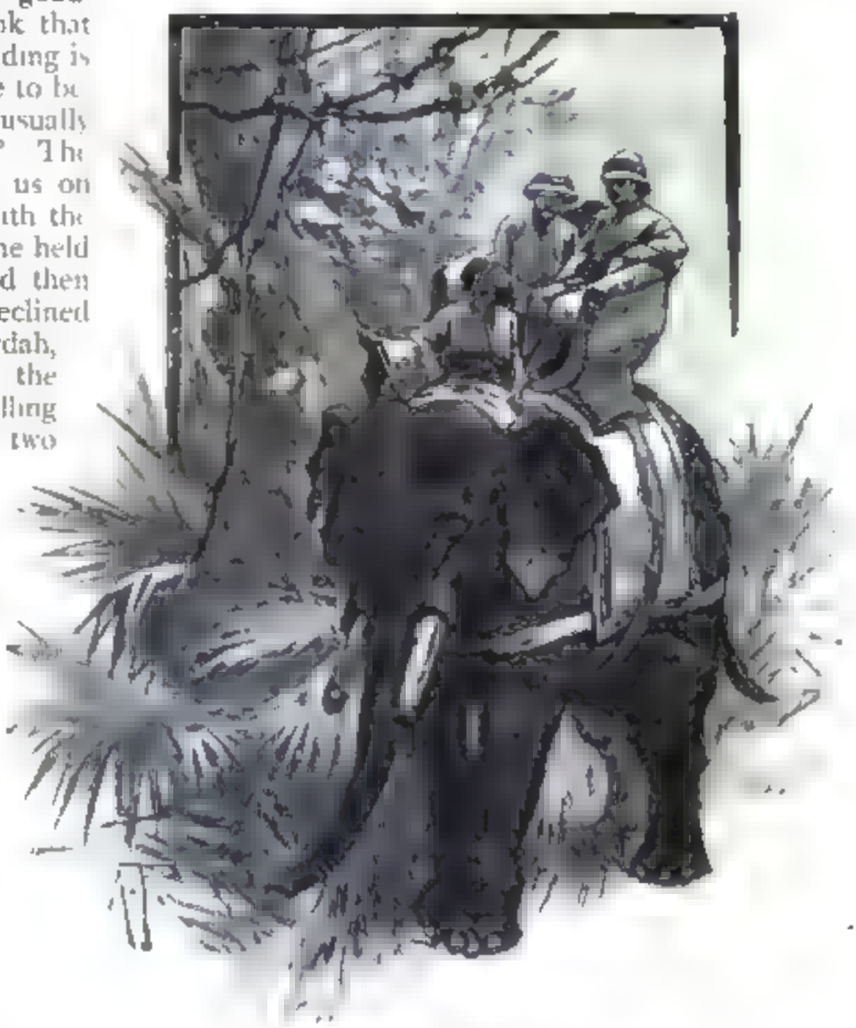
I.

"THE fine points of an elephant, sahib," said our guide Hassan, "are a colour approaching to white, the nails perfectly black, and an intact tail."

"I am glad to hear that an elephant has some qualities which recommend it," said Denviers, good-humouredly. "I should think that the one upon which we are riding is about as lazy as it is possible to be. I suppose slowness is an unusually good point, isn't it, Hassan?" The Arab, who was sitting before us on the elephant, gave it a stir with the sharply-pointed spear which he held in his hand to urge it on, and then glancing back at us, as we reclined lazily in the cushioned howdah, he said inquiringly: "Are the sahibs tired already of travelling thus? Yet we have fully two hours' journey before us."

"Hassan," I interposed, "this is a good opportunity for you to tell us exactly what you heard about that Maw-Sayah when we were at Bhamo. It is in consequence of that, indeed, that we are going to try to get among these strange Kachyens; but as we are not quite sure of the details, you may as well repeat them."

"The sahib shall be obeyed," responded our guide, and although careful to keep a good watch in front, he turned his body slightly towards us as he prepared to begin the narrative.



"THE SAHIB SHALL BE OBEYED."

On reaching Burmah we stayed for several days in Rangoon, the Queen of the East as it is called nowadays, although only remarkable formerly for its famous monasteries of Talapoins and as a halting place for the bands of pilgrims on their way to the mighty Shway Dagohn pagoda. Thence we journeyed up the Irawaddy, and having duly paid reverence to some of the nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine pagodas of Pagan—the outcast slaves of which city seemed a strange contrast to its otherwise absolute desertion—we continued our journey by steamer as far as Mandalay. Having endured the doubtful pleasure of a jaunt in a seatless, jolting bullock-carriage the bruises from which were not easily forgotten—we eventually reached Bhamo, where Hassan entered

into conversation with a hill-man. From the latter he learnt a strange story, which was later on told to us and the truth of which we hoped before long to fully test, for soon afterwards we set out on an elephant, our faithful guide in this new adventure again proving himself of the greatest service.

"Now, Hassan," said Denviers, "we are quite ready to hear this story fully, but don't add any imaginary details of your own."

"By the Koran, sahib," began the Arab, "these are the words which were those of him to whom I spoke under the shade of the log stockade."

"Which are, of course, unimpeachable," responded Denviers. "Anyone could tell that from his shifty eyes, which failed to rest upon us fixed even for a minute when we spoke to him afterwards." The Arab seemed a little disconcerted at this, but soon continued:—

"The great Spirits or Nats, who guard the prosperity of Burmah, have become greatly incensed with the Kachyens, not because they failed to resist stoutly when the monarch was deposed a few years ago——"

"Then we are to have a modern story, this time, Hassan?" interrupted Denviers. "I quite expected that you would commence with some long worn-out tradition."

"The sahibs shall hear," the Arab went on. "No one who offends the Nats of Burmah need expect anything but evil to follow. There are the Nats of the sky, the Nats of the earth, the Nats of the Irawaddy, the Nats of the five hundred little rivers, and the thousand Nats which guarded the sacred person of the monarch——"

"Yes, Hassan," said Denviers, impatiently, "you mentioned them all before. We haven't time to hear the list enumerated now; go on about this one particular Nat which you say is causing such havoc among the hill-tribes."

"Patience, sahib. The Nats were justly roused to anger because the deposed monarch was not afterwards taken to the water's edge nding upon an elephant instead of in a bullock-carriage."

"Well, Hassan," said Denviers, "judging from our own experience the Nats seem to be pretty sensible, I must say—but how do they affect the peace of mind of the Kachyens?"

"Listen, sahib. High among the hills which may be seen stretching before us lies a village in which many of the Kachyens dwell, their occupation being sometimes that of tillers of the land, but more often consisting in planning and carrying out raids upon other hill-men, or of descending at times to the plains, and there looting the towns wherein dwell more peaceable tribes. In all their forays they had been successful, for whenever their trusty dahs or swords were drawn, those who opposed them invariably obtained the worst of the encounter. So powerful did they become that at last those dwelling in the plains—Shans, Karenns, and Talaings, too—made no resistance against their attacks; and when they saw the produce of their fields carried away, thought themselves happy not to have been slain. The reason why the Kachyens became so successful in all they undertook was that a powerful forest Nat placed them under its protection, and hence they could not be harmed by their foes.

"Now it chanced that the King was in great danger through following the advice of his impetuous ministers, whereupon he summoned the Kachyens to his assistance—for their fame as warriors had reached his ears long before. But they, confident of securing their own safety whatever happened to the monarch, refused to obey his command to march against the Burman foes. The consequence was that when the indignity which I have mentioned was offered to the deposed monarch, the Nats throughout Burmah were furious with that one who ruled the village in which the Kachyens dwelt, and they sent some of their number to destroy it. The latter, however, appeased them by making a grim promise, which has been only too faithfully kept.

"A few days afterwards a hill-man, who was clearing a part of the land on the woody slope of the height, *saw the Nat*, which had never before been visible, and, terrified at the strange form which it had assumed, he ran hastily to the rest of the tribe, and, gathering them together, held a consultation as to what should be done to appease it. Some suggested that upon every tree trunk should be scratched appealing messages, which the Nat might read; others were in favour of placing a huge heap of spears and swords near the spot where the embodied Nat had been seen in order that it might be tempted to destroy all those who urged it to injure them. The messages and weapons, however, when placed for the Nat to observe did no good, for one dreadful night a rattling was heard of the bamboos which lay before one of the Kachyen's huts, and the man, going hastily to see what caused it, was swiftly carried away in the darkness without apparently uttering a single cry! For many nights in succession a similar scene was enacted, for he at whose

door the dire summons came dared not refuse to answer it lest the whole household might perish.

"Nothing more was ever seen of those thus strangely carried off, and the Kachyens, each of whom feared that his own end might come next, determined to consult some famous Buddhist priests who dwelt not far from them, and who held charge over the famous marble slabs which the great War Prince of Burmah had caused to be engraved concerning their illustrious traditions. The man whom ye saw me conversing with by the stockade was the one whom the tribe intrusted with the task; but the priests, after much consideration among themselves of the object of his visit, refused to have anything to do with such a tragic affair, and thereupon dismissed their suppliant.

"This Kachyen, when sorrowfully returning towards the hills, fearing that the tribe would destroy him because of his non-success, chanced to meet on his way a Mogul, to whom he repeated the story. The latter, laying his hand on his red-dyed and fierce-looking beard, advised the Kachyen to enter a hole in the mountain side and to consult a famous Maw-Sayah, or juggler, who dwelt there. This juggler promised assistance if the tribe would pay him a great reward in the event of his success, and when they agreed to this he entered the village and waited for dusk to arrive. Again the dreadful rattling was heard, and another Kachyen stepped out to meet his fate. None of the tribe dared to look at what transpired, except the juggler, and he too disappeared! The next morning, however, he came into the village and called its inhabitants together. When they had solemnly agreed to his conditions, he stated that the Nat was bent upon destroying them all, and that to attempt to escape by means of flight would only lead to quicker death. Then he told them what the result of his intercession for them had been.

"The Nat had been persuaded to destroy only one victim on each seventh evening at dusk, and had appointed him to see that certain conditions were not broken. He was to have a hut at his disposal, and into this the men were to go by lot, and thus the Nat would obtain a victim when the time came round. They were forbidden to wander about after sunset, and whatever noises were made not to hearken to them, since the Maw-Sayah would see that the others were unharmed. So long had this dreadful destruction lasted that more than one-half of the men in the Kachyen village, or town, as it might well be called from the large number who inhabited it, had perished, and yet the Nat still demanded a victim, and the Maw-Sayah is there to see that the compact is fulfilled. The man who told this story, sahibs, declares that the keeper of the Nat has by this means obtained sway over the Kachyens to such an extent that they have become his abject slaves, for the custom of drawing lots has been abolished, and he selects whom he will to sacrifice to the Nat. By some means this Kachyen offended the Maw-Sayah, who thereupon condemned him, but he, in terror of the sudden and silent

death in store for him, fled to Bhamo, where he lives in momentary fear of destruction. Such then, sahibs, is the story, and it is to see this Maw-Sayah and the Nat at their fell work to-night that even now our faces are turned to the high land before us, up which we must climb, for there is but one narrow pathway leading to the village."

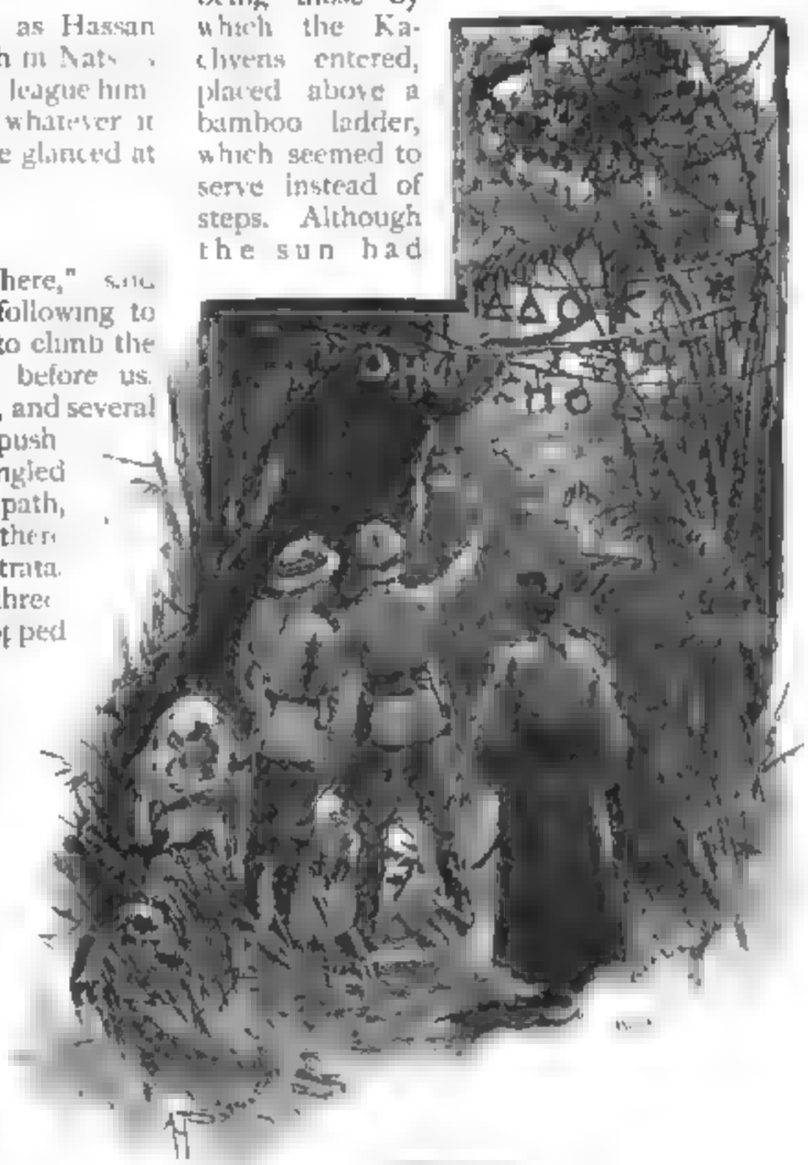
Hassan ceased, and then Denviers turned to me as he said: —

"I think that this Maw-Sayah, as Hassan calls him, has about as much faith in Nats as we have. It suits his purpose to league himself with something mysterious; whatever it is we will try to find out," and he glanced at the weapons which we carried.

II.

"THE sahibs must dismount here," said Hassan shortly afterwards, and following to the ground our guide, we began to climb the mountain path which stretched before us. The ascent was exceedingly steep, and several times we stopped to rest after pushing our way through the tangled masses which almost hid the path, which was itself cut here and there apparently through the rocky strata. When we had reached about three fourths of our journey Hassan stopped and pointed out to us one of the thatched roofs of a hut, which seemed in the distance scarcely noticeable until his keen eyesight discovered it. The village, we found, lay a little to the left of the mountain path, for on nearing the summit we found ourselves passing through a peculiar avenue of trees interspersed with long bamboo poles. From the tops of the latter there were stretched across the approach strong, rough-looking cords, which supported various uncouth emblems, and among which were large triangles, circles, and stars, cut apparently out of the stems of huge bamboos. After traversing this avenue for nearly three hundred yards we saw the tree trunks which Hassan had mentioned, and which were deeply scarred with cabalistic messages to the fierce Nat, which we could not of course understand. Affixed to some of the trees farther on we saw a number of spears and dahs mingled with shorter weapons, the latter being made of some species of hard wood, and close to them we observed the skulls of several large animals, one of which we judged was that of an elephant.

In spite of the fact that the village was a large one, the buildings were of a very primitive construction, being made of bamboos with thatched coverings, reaching almost to the piles on which the huts were placed. We did not observe any openings made to serve as windows, the only ones noticeable being those by which the Kachyens entered, placed above a bamboo ladder, which seemed to serve instead of steps. Although the sun had scarcely set, the village was wrapped in a strange silence, the sound of our footsteps alone being heard. The smoke that seemed to be forcing its way through stray holes in the thatch amply convinced us, however, that the inhabitants were within doors, and, turning to our Arab guide, I asked him if he could distinguish among the many huts the one in which we expected to find the Maw-Sayah. He seemed a little uncertain at first, but after wandering through the village together we



returned, and then Hassan, who had been very observant the whole time, pointed to one of the rudely-constructed huts and said:—

"I think that is the one into which we seek to enter; it is situated according to the position in which the Kachyen said it was, and, besides, it bears a strange proof of the story which ye have listened to with such ill-concealed disbelief."

"Why do you think that is the hut, Hassan?" I asked, for, to my eyes, no difference between that and the others close to it was distinguishable.

"If the sahib will look at the bamboo ladder and observe it carefully, he will see that it is unlike the others round," said the Arab.

"I suppose you refer to these deep scratches upon it, don't you, Hassan?" asked Denviers, as he pointed to some marks, a few of which were apparently fairly recent.

"The sahib guesses rightly," answered our guide. "You will remember that the Kachyen stated to me that the Nat is accustomed to obtain its victim now from the abode of the Maw-Sayah; those marks, then, have been made by it when it dragged its human prey out of the hut." We gazed curiously at the marks for a few minutes, then Denviers broke the silence by asking the Arab why it was that the Nat made marks at all.

"I should have thought that such a powerful spirit could prevent such evidences of its presence becoming observed," he continued. "My respect for it is certainly not increased by seeing those deep scars; they seem to be made by something which has sharp claws."

"That is because of the shape which it has assumed, sahib," said the Arab, "for the Nats have wondrous powers."

"Very likely, Hassan," interposed Denviers; "I suppose they can do exactly what they like, can they not?" I was much surprised at the limit which was, however, placed upon their powers by our guide, for he responded quickly:

"Not altogether, sahib. There is one thing that a Nat cannot do, according to the reports of these Kachyens, and that is, they are unable to move in a direction which is not straight, and hence they are careful to avoid rough ground, where tangled masses and boulders bar their progress, so they usually frequent the open avenues, such as the one which we have just passed through. The symbols above it and the writings and weapons are all for the Nat's benefit."

"And the elephant's skull?" asked Denviers, irreverently. "What is that put up for?" The Arab, however, had an explanation ready, for he promptly replied:—

"That indicates where the supplies of food are to be found when the Nat requires any." Denviers turned to me for a moment as he said:

"I should have thought it a good plan, then, to have put it upon the hut of this Maw-Sayah whom we are about to interview. See that your weapons are in good order, Harold, we may soon need them." Giving a cautious look at my belt and the weapons thrust into it, I followed Denviers, who had mounted the short bamboo ladder, and was endeavouring to obtain admission to the hut. We heard a harsh sound within, then the cry of someone apparently terror-stricken, and a moment afterwards we had pushed past the Maw-Sayah, who by no means was willing to allow us to enter the rude dwelling.

The single room, which seemed to constitute the hut, was extremely low and bare of furniture entirely. A few bamboos were spread in one part of it, while at the far end was a fire, the light from which was partly obscured by the smoke, which almost suffocated us, so thickly did it roll up and then spread through the hut. Near the door stood a man scarcely clothed, upon whose face we saw a look of the most abject terror, for, as we surmised, the noise of our entry was mistaken by him for the approach of the fell thing to which he was condemned by the Maw-Sayah. We moved towards the latter as he threw himself down by the fire, which he had only left to see who it was that came unbidden to the hut where to enter was the preceding event to death. He was clothed in a long blue strip of linen, which wound round his waist and covered his body, partly leaving his dark chest uncovered. His features were stamped with an appearance of supreme cunning, his oblique eyes reminding us of a Chinaman, while the fierce look in them as they glared at us from either side of an aquiline nose, which betrayed his Burmese descent, did not increase our confidence in the man as he stretched out his bony hands over the fire as if for warmth, although outside the hut we had found the heat almost insupportable.

"What do ye seek?" he demanded, as he looked into our faces in turn and seemed astonished at our strange features.

"We are travellers who wished to see a Kachyen village," responded Denviers, "and

we further desired to see some of its inhabitants; but as none were visible we entered this hut, even against your will. Where are the people who dwell here?" The man whom my companion addressed pointed to the Kachyen near the doorway, as he responded:—

"There is one of them, and in a short time even he will never be seen again."

"Can you give us food?" hazarded Hassan, in order to get the man to continue his conversation, for the Arab evidently was expecting that the Nat would soon arrive upon the scene. The Maw-Sayah rose and pointed to the entrance as he cried:—

"That way ye came, that way shall ye depart. Food for ye I have not, nor would I give it if I had." I turned to Denviers and said in a low tone:

"What shall we do, Frank? I don't think our opportunity of seeing what may transpire will be as good within the hut as without it. Whatever the solution is to this affair, if we are outside we shall see this Kachyen dragged away, and may further watch the approach of whatever caused those strange marks which we observed."

"One thing is clear," said my companion, "we will attempt to save this intended victim, at all events. I expect that if we tried we could get him away easily enough, but that plan would not be of much service. We must attack this being, whatever it is, with which this Maw-Sayah is leagued. How I should like to hand him over as a victim instead of that trembling captive by the door. It shows to what extent this juggler has acquired power over this tribe, for I notice that his captive is unbound, and is certainly a much finer built man than the other."

"It wants less than an hour to dusk, sahibs," said Hassan, who had listened carefully to our remarks; "if we were to station ourselves a little away from the hut we could see what took place, and if the Nat were mortal we might attack it."

Denviers shrugged his shoulders at the Arab's supposition as he responded:—

"WHAT DO YE SEEK?"

"There is little doubt, Hassan, that the Nat would smart if that keen blade of yours went a little too near it, but I think your plan is a good one, and we will adopt it, as it falls in with what has already been said." We gave a final look at the crafty face of the man who was still seated by the fire, and then brushing past the captive we made for the open village again.

"I feel sorry for this Kachyen," said Denviers. "He will have a dreadful five minutes of it, I expect; but it is our only way of preventing, if possible, such an affair from occurring again." On leaving the hut we stationed ourselves almost opposite to it, and then began to keep watch. What we should see pass up the avenue we could only surmise, but our suppositions certainly did not lead us to imagine in the faintest degree the sight which before long was destined to completely startle us.

III.

THE grey dusk was becoming night when among the dark stems of the trees we saw some black form move over the ground. We could scarcely distinguish it as it crawled over the bamboo logs and made a rasping

noise as it clung to the ladder. The door of the hut yielded to it, and a minute after it again emerged and bore with it the terrified Kachyen. We crept after it as it dragged

I. A. AIN EMERGED

its captive down the avenue, striving our utmost to make out its shape. One thing we could tell, which was that the creature was not upright; but our movement behind it was apparently known, for it struggled to move quicker over the ground with its human burden.

"Shall I shoot it?" I whispered to Denviers, as my nerves seemed to be almost unstrung at the unknowableness of the creeping thing.

"You would more likely kill the man," he responded. "Follow as noiselessly as you can—it will not let its prey escape, be sure of that. Once we track it to its haunt we will soon dispatch it, big and fierce as it seems."

We drew nearer and nearer to it, until it had passed half-way down the avenue, then it seemed to become lost to our view, although we were, as we knew, close to it. I felt Denviers' hand upon my shoulder, and then he whispered

"The Kachyen is being dragged up a tree just in front—look!" I could just distinguish something moving up the trunk, when suddenly the captive, who had hitherto been apparently paralyzed with terror, uttered a cry and then must have succeeded in disengaging himself from the dreadful thing that had held him, for the noise of someone falling to the ground was heard, and a minute after we distinguished the form of a man rushing headlong back to the village for safety.

We did not anticipate such an event, and were contemplating a search for the captor of the Kachyen, when a cold sweat broke out upon me, for the clammy claws of the man hunter had touched me! The sensation which seized me was only of short duration, for I felt myself released just as Denviers said:—

"Harold, the Kachyen has fled, and his captor, determined to secure its prey, has betaken its crawling body after him. If only we had a light! I saw something like a black shadow moving onwards; get your pistol ready and follow." I just distinguished Denviers as he passed on in front of me, Hassan coming last. When we reached the hut of the Maw-Sayah we stopped at once, for, from the cry which came from it, we rightly surmised that the terrible seeker for human prey had made for this place, thinking, in its dull intelligence, that its captive had returned. We thrust ourselves into the hut, and saw by the red firelight a sanguinary contest between the Maw-Sayah and the black object which we had endeavoured to track. Thinking that the Kachyen was being destroyed, the juggler had not fastened his door, and the enraged man-eater had seized him as he rested on the ground, quite at its mercy!

The Maw-Sayah was struggling with his bony hands to extricate himself from the clutches of a monstrous tree-spider! We had seen, on an island in the South Seas, several cocoa-nut crabs, and this reptile somewhat resembled them, but was even larger. Grasping the juggler with several of its long, furry-looking claws, it fixed its glaring red eyes in mad anger upon him as he grasped in each

hand one of its front pair of legs, which were armed with strong, heavy-looking pincers. He besought us wildly to shoot, even if we killed him, held as he was by his relentless foe.

"Harold," cried my companion, "keep clear, and look out for yourself when I fire at this reptile; most likely it will make for one of us." He drew right close to it, and thrust

ing the barrel of his pistol between its eyes touched the trigger. The explosion shook the hut, its effect upon the spider being to cause it to rush frantically about the floor, dragging the Maw-Sayah as if he were some slight burden scarcely observable.

"You missed it!" I cried. "Look out, Hassan, guard the doorway!" The Arab stood, sword in hand, waiting for it to make for the entrance, while Denviers exclaimed:—

"I shot it through the head!" and a minute afterwards the trueness of his aim was manifest, for the claws released, and the Maw-Sayah, wounded badly, but saved, stood free from the muscular twitchings of the dead spider.

"You scoundrel!" said Denviers to him, "I have a good mind to serve you the same. You deserve to die as so many of these simple-minded, credulous Kachyens have done." I thought for one brief second that my companion was about to kill the juggler, for through all our adventures I had never seen him so thoroughly roused. I stood between them; then, when Denviers quickly recovered his self-command, I turned to the Maw-Sayah and asked:—

"If we spare your life, will you promise to leave this village and never to return?" He turned his evil-looking but scared face towards us eagerly as he replied:—

"I will do whatever you wish." Denviers motioned to him to rest upon the ground, which he did, then turning to me, said:—

"It is pretty apparent what this juggler has done. The man who first reported the discovery of this Nat, as the foolish Kachyens call it, simply disturbed a monstrous spider which had lived in the trees which he felled—that accounts for his seeing it. Finding animal food scarce, the reptile ventured into this village and tried to get into one of the huts. Its exertions were rewarded by the Kachyen coming to the door, whom it accordingly seized. To continue its plan, which proved so successful, needed very little reasoning power on the part of such a cunning creature. No doubt this Maw-Sayah purposely left the door of his hut unfastened each seventh night, and the spider thus became accustomed to seek for its victim there. I daresay it came the other nights, but the juggler was then careful enough to keep his hut well fastened."

"What do the sahibs propose to do?" interrupted Hassan. Denviers turned to him, as he responded:

"We will wait for daybreak; then, having dragged the dead spider out where the

Kachyens may see that it is no longer able to harm them, we will take this Maw-Sayah down the mountain path away from the village as poor as he came."

"A good plan," I assented, and we followed it out, eventually leaving the juggler, and climbing once more into the howdah upon the elephant, which we found close to the spot where we had left it, secured from wandering far away by the rope which Hassan had used to hinder its movements.

We entered Bhamo, and while we took a much-needed rest, our guide—as we afterwards learnt—searched for and found the fugitive Kachyen, who, on hearing that his safety was secured, hastily departed to the village to rejoice with the rest of his tribe that the so-called Nat would not do them any more injury.

"YOU SCOUNDREL!"

Shafts from an Eastern Quiver.

X.—THE HUNTED TRIBE OF THREE HUNDRED PEAKS.

By Charles J. Mansford, B.A.

I.

"ARE you awake, sahibs?" questioned Hassan, our guide, as he eagerly roused us from sleep one night. "The Hunted Tribe of Three Hundred Peaks is about its deadly work! Listen!"

We sat up and leant forward as he spoke, straining our ears to catch the slightest sound. Across the plain which stretched before us came at intervals a faint cry, which sounded like the hoot of a night bird.

"That is their strange signal," continued the Arab.

We rose, and, going to the door of the tent, scanned the wide plain, but could see no human being crossing it.

"You are mistaken this time, Hassan," said Denviers. "What you heard was an owl hooting."

"The sahib it is who misjudges," answered the Arab, calmly. "I have heard the warning note of the tribe before."

"It seems to come from the direction of Ayuthia," I interposed, pointing to where the faint outlines of the spires of its pagodas rose like shadows under the starlit sky.

"It comes from beyond Ayuthia," responded Hassan, whose keen sense of hearing was so remarkable; "and is as far away as the strange city built on the banks round a sunken ship, which we saw as we floated down the Meinam. Hist! I hear the signal again!"

Once more we listened, but that time the cry came to us from a different direction.

"It is only an owl hooting," repeated Denviers, "which has now flown to some other part of the plain and is hidden from us by one of the ruined palaces, which seem to rise up like ghosts in the moonlight. If Hassan means to wake us up every time he hears a bird screech we shall get little enough rest. I'm going to lie down again." He entered the tent, followed by us, and stretching himself wearily was asleep a few minutes after this, while Hassan and I sat conversing together, for the strange, bird-like cry prevented me from following Denviers' example.

"*Coot! Coot!*" came the signal again, and in spite of my companion's opinion I felt forced to agree with the Arab that there was something more than a bird hooting, for at times I plainly heard an answering cry.

After our adventure in the northern part of Burmah we had travelled south into the heart of Siam, where we parted with our elephant, and passed down the Meinam in one of the barges scooped out of a tree trunk, such as are commonly used to navigate

this river. Disembarking at Ayuthia we had visited the ruins of the ancient city, and afterwards continued on our way towards the mouth of the river. While examining the colossal images which lie amid the other relics of the city's past greatness, Hassan had told us a weird story, to which, however, at that time we paid but scant attention.

On the night when our Arab guide had roused us so suddenly, our tent was pitched at some distance from the bank of the river, where a fantastic natural bridge of jagged white limestone spanned the seething waters of the tumbling rapids below, and united the two parts of the great plain. Sitting close to the entrance of the tent with Hassan, I could see far away to the west the tops of the great range of the Three Hundred Peaks beyond the plain. Recollecting that Hassan had mentioned them in his story, I was just on the point of asking him to repeat it when I heard the strange cry once more. A moment after the Arab seized me by the arm and pointed towards the plain before us.

I looked in the direction which Hassan indicated, and my eyes rested on the dismantled wall of a ruined palace. I observed nothing further for a few minutes, then a dusky form seemed to be hiding in the shadow of the wall. "*Coot!*" came the signal again, striking upon the air softly as if the one who uttered it feared to be discovered. The cry had apparently been uttered by someone beyond the river bank, for the man lurking in the shadow of the ruin stepped boldly out from it into the moonlit plain. He stood there silent for a moment, then dropped into the high grass, above which we saw him raise his head and cautiously return the signal.

"What do you think he is doing there, Hassan?" I asked the Arab, in a whisper, as I saw his hand wander to the hilt of his sword.

"The hill-men have seen our tent while out on one of their expeditions," he responded, softly. "I think they are going to attempt to take us by surprise, but by the aid of the Prophet we will outwit them."

I felt no particular inclination to place much trust in Mahomet's help, as the danger which confronted us dawned fully upon my mind, so instead I moved quickly over to Denviers, and awoke him.

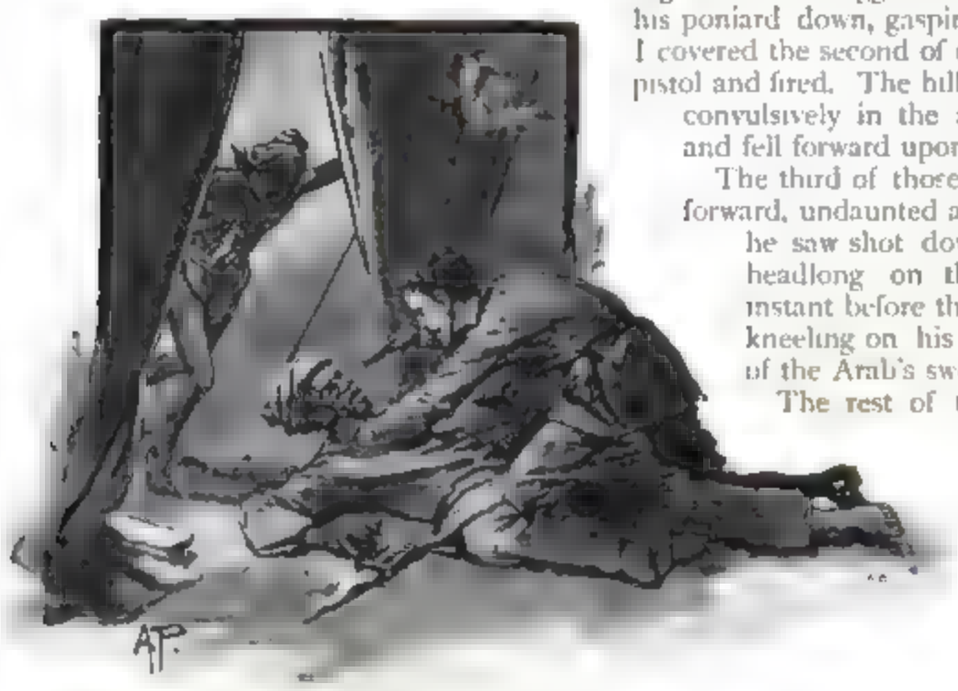
"Is it the owl again?" he asked, as I motioned to him to look through the opening of the tent. Immediately he did so, and saw the swarthy face of a turbaned hill-man raised above the rank grass, as its owner made slowly but steadily towards our tent, worming along like a snake, and leaving a thin line of beaten-down herbage to show where his body had passed. Denviers drew from his belt one of the pistols thrust there, for we had taken the precaution at Rangoon to get a couple each, since our own were lost in our adventure off Ceylon. I quietly imitated his example, and, drawing well away from the entrance of the tent, so that our watchfulness might not be observed, we waited for the hill-man to approach. Halfway between the ruined palace wall and our tent he stopped, and then I felt Hassan's hand upon my arm again as, with the other, he pointed towards the river bank.

"THE SWARTHY FACE OF A TURBANED HILL-MAN."

We saw the grass moving there, and through it came a second hill-man, who gradually drew near to the first. On reaching him the second comer also became motionless, while we next saw four other trails of beaten-down grass, marking the advance of further foes. How many more were coming on behind we could only sur-

mise, as we watched the six hill-men who headed them get into a line one before the other, and then advance, keeping about five yards apart as they came on. From the position in which our tent was pitched it was impossible for an attack to be made upon us in the rear, and this circumstance fortunately allowed of undivided attention to the movements of the hill-men whom we saw creeping silently forward.

"Wait till the first one of them gets to the opening of our tent," whispered Denviers to me; "and while I deal with him shoot down the second. Keep cool and take a steady aim as he rises from the grass, and whatever you do, don't miss him."



"HE SULLENLY FLUNG HIS PONIARD DOWN."

I held my pistol ready as we waited for them to come on, and each second measured with our eyes the distance which still separated us. Twenty yards from the tent the foremost of the hill-men took the kris or bent poniard with which he was armed from between his teeth, and held it aloft in his right hand as he came warily crawling on a foot at a time followed by the others, each with his weapon raised as though already about to plunge it into our throats. It was not a very cheering spectacle, but we held our weapons ready and watched their advance through the grass, determined to thrust them back.

I felt my breath come fast as the first hill-man stopped when within half-a-dozen yards of the tent and listened carefully. I could have easily shot him down as he half rose to his feet, and his fierce eyes glittered in his swarthy face. Almost mechanically I noticed the loose shirt and trousers which he wore, and saw the white turban lighting up his bronzed features as he crept right up to our tent and thrust his head in, confident that those within it were asleep. The next instant he was down, with Denviers' hand on his throat and a pistol thrust into his astonished face, as my companion exclaimed:

"Drop your weapon or I'll shoot you!"

The hill-man glared like a tiger for a moment, then he saw the advantage of following Denviers' suggestion. He sullenly flung his poniard down, gasping for breath, just as I covered the second of our enemies with my pistol and fired. The hill-man raised his arms convulsively in the air, gave a wild cry, and fell forward upon his face, dead!

The third of those attacking us dashed forward, undaunted at the fate of the one he saw shot down, only to be flung headlong on the grass the next instant before the tent, with Hassan kneeling on his chest and the point of the Arab's sword at his throat.

The rest of the enemy did not wait to continue the combat, but rose from the grass and dispersed precipitately over the plain, making for the limestone bridge across the river. I rushed forward to Hassan's assistance, and bound the captive's arms, while the Arab held him down as I knotted tightly the sash I had taken from my waist. Then I made for the tent, to find that Denviers had already secured the first prisoner by lashing about him a stout piece of tent rope. My companion forced his captive from the tent into the open plain, where we held a whispered conversation as to whether the two prisoners should live or die. The safer plan was undoubtedly to shoot them, for we both agreed that at any moment our own position might become a critical one if the rest of the horde made another attempt upon us, as we fully expected would be done.

However, we finally decided to spare their lives, for a time at all events, and while Hassan and Denviers led the captives across the plain, I brought from the tent part of a

long coil of rope which we had and followed them. As soon as we neared the river bank we selected two suitable trees from a clump growing there and lashed the prisoners securely to them, threatening instant death if they attempted to signal their whereabouts to any of the hill-men who might be lurking about.

"Get our rifles and ammunition, Hassan," said Denviers to the Arab. Then turning to me, he continued: "We shall have some tough fighting I expect when those niggers return, but we are able to hold our own better out of the tent than in it." Hassan brought our weapons, saying as he handed them to us:—

"The sahibs are wise to prepare for another attack, since the enemy must return this way. They have not gone off towards the far mountain peaks, but crossed yonder limestone bridge instead."

"What do you understand from that movement?" Denviers asked Hassan.

"The sound which we heard at first came from the strange city of which I spoke," he replied. "Some of the fierce hill-men have made a night attack upon it, and will soon return this way. Those we have beaten off have gone to meet them and to speak of the failure to surprise us. What they are doing in the city round the sunken ship will shortly be apparent. The whole band is a terrible scourge to the cities of the Meinam, for, by Allah, as I told the sahibs at Ayuthia, the Hunted Tribe has a weird history indeed."

Trailing our rifles, we walked through the rank grass, then resting upon a fallen column, where the shadow of the ruined palace wall concealed us from the view of the enemy if they crossed the bridge, we listened to Hassan's story. At the same time we kept a careful watch upon the jagged limestone spanning the river, ready at a moment's notice to renew the struggle, and it was well for us that we did so.

II.

"It is a strange, wild story which the sahibs shall again hear of the Hunted Tribe and of its leader," began Hassan, as he rested at our feet with his sword gripped in his hand ready to wield it in our service at any moment; "and thus ye will know why the band is out to-night on its fell errand. Years ago, before the Burmese had overrun Siam, and while Ayuthia was its capital, so famous for its pagodas and palaces, Yu Chan became head of the bonzes or priests of the royal monastery.

"Who the great bonze was by birth none knew, although it was whispered through the kingdom that he sprang from a certain illustrious family which urged his claim to the position to which the ruler reluctantly appointed him. The subject bonzes looked darkly upon him, for he was but young, while many of them were bowed with age and aspired to hold the high office to which Yu Chan had been appointed. Oft they drew together in the gloomy cloisters, and when he swept past in silence, raised their hands threateningly at his disappearing form, though before his lofty, stern-set face they bowed in seeming humility as they kissed the hem of his magnificent robe.

THEY RAISED THEIR HANDS THREATENINGLY AT HIS DISAPPEARING FORM.

"Among these bonzes was one who especially resented Yu Chan's rule over him, for he

was more learned in the subtile crafts of the East than the rest, and the potency of his spells was known and feared throughout Siam. An unbending ascetic, indeed, was the grey-bearded Klan Hua, and the ruler of the country had already promised to him that he should become the head of the bonzes whenever the office was vacated. So much was this ruler influenced by Klan Hua that he built a covered way from his palace by which he might pass at night into the bonze's rude cell to hear the interpretation of his dreams, or learn the coming events of his destiny. Yet, in spite of all this, when the chief bonze died, the ruler of Siam, after much hesitation, gave the coveted office to Yu Chan. Judge, then, of the fierce hatred which this roused in Klan Hua's breast, and ye will understand the reason of the plot which he formed against the one who held the position he so much desired."

"Never mind about the quarrels of these estimable bonzes, Hassan," interrupted Denviers. "Go on and tell us of these hill-men, or you won't get that yarn finished before they return, in which case we may never have the chance to hear the end of it."

"The sahib is always impatient," answered the Arab gravely; then he continued, quite heedless of Denviers' suggestion: "On the nights when the ruler went not to Klan Hua's cell, the latter gathered there several of the other bonzes, and they sat darkly plotting till morning came. Then they crept stealthily back to their own cells, to shift their eyes nervously each time that the stern glance of Yu Chan fell upon them, as he seemed to read there their guilty secret.

"They planned to poison him, but he left the tampered food untasted. Then they drew lots to assassinate him as he slept, but the one whose tablet was marked with a poniard was found lifeless the next day, with his weapon still clutched in his stiffened fingers, and none knew how he died. That day the eyes of Yu Chan grew sterner set than ever, as he gazed searchingly into the face of each bonze as they passed in a long procession before him, while the conspirators grew livid with fear and baffled rage at the cold smile with which he seemed to mock at the failure of their schemes. Then they made one last effort a few days after, and ye shall hear how it ended.

"The stately Meinam, which glitters before us under the midnight sky, yearly overflows and renders the earth about it productive. Far as the history of Siam is recorded in the traditions of the race, it has been the custom to perform a strange ceremony, intended to impress the common people with awe for the ruler. Even now the King of Siam, he who sends the silver tree to China in token of subjection, still adheres to it, and on the day when the waters of the Meinam have reached their highest point he sends a royal barge down the swollen waters manned by a hundred bonzes, who command the turbid stream to rise no higher. So then it happened that the rise of the river took place, and Klan Hua, who was learned in such things, counted to the hour when the barge should be launched, even as he had done for many years. When the ruler visited him one eventful night he declared that the turbid waters would be at their full on the morrow, and so the command to them to cease rising could then safely be given.

"Accordingly the royal barge was launched, amid the cries of the people, whereupon the ruler soon entered it and, fanned by a female slave, leant back upon the sumptuous cushions under a canopy of crimson silk, while by his side was the chief bonze—Yu Chan. Near the ruler was the grey-bearded Klan Hua, with an evil smile upon his face as he saw his rival resting on the cushions in the place which he had hoped so long to fill.

"Out into the middle of the swollen river the royal barge went; then half way between bank and bank the rhythmic music of the oars as they dipped together into the water ceased, and the rowers rested. From his seat Yu Chan arose, and uttered in the priestly tongue the words which laid a spell upon the stream and bade it cease to rise. Scarcely had he done so and sunk back again upon the cushions when Klan Hua threw himself at the monarch's feet and petitioned to utter a few words to him. The ruler raised the bonze, and bade him speak. Holding one hand aloft, the plotting Klan Hua pointed with the other towards the astonished Yu Chan, as he fiercely cried:—

"'Thou false-tongued traitor, thou hast insulted thy monarch to his face!'

"The ruler bent forward from his cushions and looked in surprise from the accuser to the accused.

"'Speak!' he cried to Klan Hua; 'make good thy unseemly charge, or, old as thou art, thy head shall roll from thy shoulders!'

"'Great Ruler of Siam and Lord of the White Elephant,' exclaimed the accuser, giving the monarch his strange but august title, 'I declare to thee that the chief bonze has doomed the country to destruction. Taking advantage of the language in which

the exorcism is pronounced, he has done what never the greatest prince under thee would dare to do. This man, the head of our order, has spoken words which will make the people scorn thee and this ceremony, if his command comes to pass. Yu Chan, the traitor, has bidden the waters *to rise!*'

"The monarch crimsoned with anger, as he turned to Yu Chan, who had already regained his composure, and sat with crossed arms, smiling scornfully at his accuser, and then asked :—

"'Hast thou so misused thy power? Speak!'

"'How can'st thou doubt me, knowing my great descent?' cried Yu Chan, bitterly. 'Even at thy bidding I will not answer a question which casts so much shame upon me.'

"'Thou can'st not deny this charge!' exclaimed the infuriated monarch.

"'Not so,' replied the chief bonze, 'I will not!. If thou carest to believe the slanderous words which Klan Hua has uttered, and such that not one in this barge will dare to repeat, so be it!'

"Yu Chan withdrew from his seat at the monarch's side, and taking his rival's place pointed to the one he had himself vacated.

"'There rest thyself, and be at last content,' he said, scornfully: 'thou false bonze, whisper thence more of thy malicious words into the ears of the great ruler of Siam!'

"The monarch was disconcerted for a moment, then motioning one of the other bonzes forward, he exclaimed :—

"'Yu Chan declares that no one in this barge will support his accuser's words. Thou who wert near, tell me, what am I to believe?'

"'Alas!' answered the bonze, with simulated grief, 'Klan Hua spoke truly, great monarch; thy trust in Yu Chan has been sorely abused.'

"One after another the bonzes near came before the monarch and gave the same testimony, for the crafty Klan Hua had so placed the plotters for the furtherance of their subtle scheme. The ruler gazed angrily at Yu Chan, then summoning his rival to his side, bade him rest there.

"'Henceforth thou art chief bonze,' he said; then added threateningly to the fallen one: 'Thou shalt be exiled from this hour, and if the waters rise to-morrow, as thou hast bidden them, I will have thee hunted down, hide where thou mayest, and thy head shall fall.'

"The barge reached the shore, and the people drew back amazed to see the monarch pass on, attended closely by Klan Hua, while he who was as they thought chief bonze flung off his great robe of purple-embroidered silk, and idly watched the bonzes disembark, then moved slowly away across the great plain.

"Two days afterwards Klan Hua was found dead in his cell covered with the robes of his newly-acquired office, and the ruler of Siam had dispatched a body of soldiers to hunt down Yu Chan and to take him alive or dead to Ayuthia. The Meinam had risen still higher the day after the ceremony, not, as the startled monarch thought, because of the deposed one's power, but owing to Klan

"KLAN HUA WAS FOUND DEAD IN HIS CELL."

Hua's deception in regard to the real time when he knew the water would reach its limit.

"Then began the strange events which made the name of Yu Chan so memorable. For some years a band of marauders had taken possession of the far range known as the Three Hundred Peaks, but hitherto their raids in Burmah and Siam had attracted scant attention, while in Ayuthia few knew of their existence. To them the bonze went, and when the half-savage troops sent in search of him were encamped on the edge of the plain the mountaineers unexpectedly swooped down upon them. The remnant which escaped hastened back to the monarch with strange stories of the prowess of the

enemy, and especially of Yu Chan, the exile, whom they averred led on the foe to victory. The ruler of Siam, deeply chagrined at their non-success, ordered the vanquished ones to be decapitated for their failure to bring back the bonze or his lifeless body.

"A second expedition was sent against them, but the mountaineers held their fastnesses so well that, in despair of conquering them, the few who survived their second onslaught slew themselves rather than return to Ayuthia to suffer a like fate to that which the monarch had awarded the others. Maddened at these repeated defeats, the ruler himself headed a large army and invested the passes, cutting off the supplies of the mountaineers, in the hope of starving them into subjection. So deeply was he roused against Yu Chan that he offered to pardon the rebels on condition that they betrayed their leader.

"They scornfully rejected such terms, and withdrew to the heart of the mountains to endure all the horrors of famine with a courage which was heroic. At times the brave band made desperate efforts to break through the wall of men which girded them about, and each onset, in which they were beaten back, inspired them to try yet again.

"The Malay who told me their story declared they were reduced to such straits at last that for one dreadful month they lived upon their dead. Never once did they waver from their allegiance to Yu Chan, whose stern-set face inspired them to resist to the last, for well he knew that the monarch's promise could not be trusted, and that surrender for them meant death. Often would they be repulsed at sunset in an attempt to break through the cordon which held them, and yet before nightfall, at the entrance of some precipitous pass, far remote from that spot, swift and sudden the gaunt and haggard band appeared, led on by Yu Chan, sword in hand, as he hewed down those who dared to face him.

"Just when they were most oppressed relief came to the band of a quite unexpected kind, for the Burmese on the border overran Siam, and the soldiers were withdrawn to meet the new enemy. So, for a time, the band was left unmolested; but still none, save their leader, ventured to leave their wild haunts. Before he had been appointed chief of the bonzes who brought about his exile, Yu Chan had been the lover of a maiden of Ayuthia, but the high office which had been bestowed on him kept them apart. No sooner had the robes which he wore as a bonze been exchanged for those of a mountaineer than Yu Chan determined to see this maiden again. On the departure of their enemies he prepared to visit Ayuthia, although strongly counselled not to do so by his devoted band. He was, however, obdurate, and set forth on his perilous enterprise alone.

"Yu Chan crossed the great plain of Siam, and then, resting in a thatched hut upon the bank of the Meinam, dispatched a Malay, who chanced to dwell there, with a message to his beloved to visit him, for he thought it useless to attempt to enter Ayuthia if he wished to live. At nightfall the Malay returned from the island in the middle of the bend of the Meinam, whereon ye know the city is built. He thrust a tablet into Yu Chan's hand, whereon was a desire that the latter would wait the maiden's coming at a part of the bank where often the boat of the lovers had touched at before. Soon the exile beheld the slight craft making for the shore, manned by six rowers muffled in their cloaks, for the night was cold. Happy indeed would it have been for the lovers if the maiden had scanned closely the features of those who ferried her across the river, for the treacherous Malay had recognised Yu Chan, and six of the monarch's soldiers were the supposed boatmen, hurriedly gathered to take the exile or to slay him.

"The maiden stepped from the boat, and, with a glad cry, flung her arms about Yu Chan, who had passed down the narrow path to meet her. Together they climbed up the steep way that led to the plain above the high bank, followed by the muffled soldiers, who lurked cautiously in the shadows of the limestone, through which wound the toilsome path. Once, as they passed along, a slight sound behind them arrested the footsteps of the lovers, and Yu Chan turned and glanced back searchingly, then on they went again. For an hour or more they wandered together over the plain, then, with many a sigh, turned to descend the path once more. Again they heard a sound, and that time on looking round quickly Yu Chan saw the boatmen, whom he had thought awaited the maiden's return by the river brink, stealing closely after him, their faces shrouded in their black cloaks.

"At once his suspicions were aroused, and hastily unsheathing his sword he confronted them just as they flung off their cloaks and the fierce faces of six of the half-savage soldiery of the monarch were revealed to Yu Chan. Slowly the latter retreated till he was a little way down the path with his back to

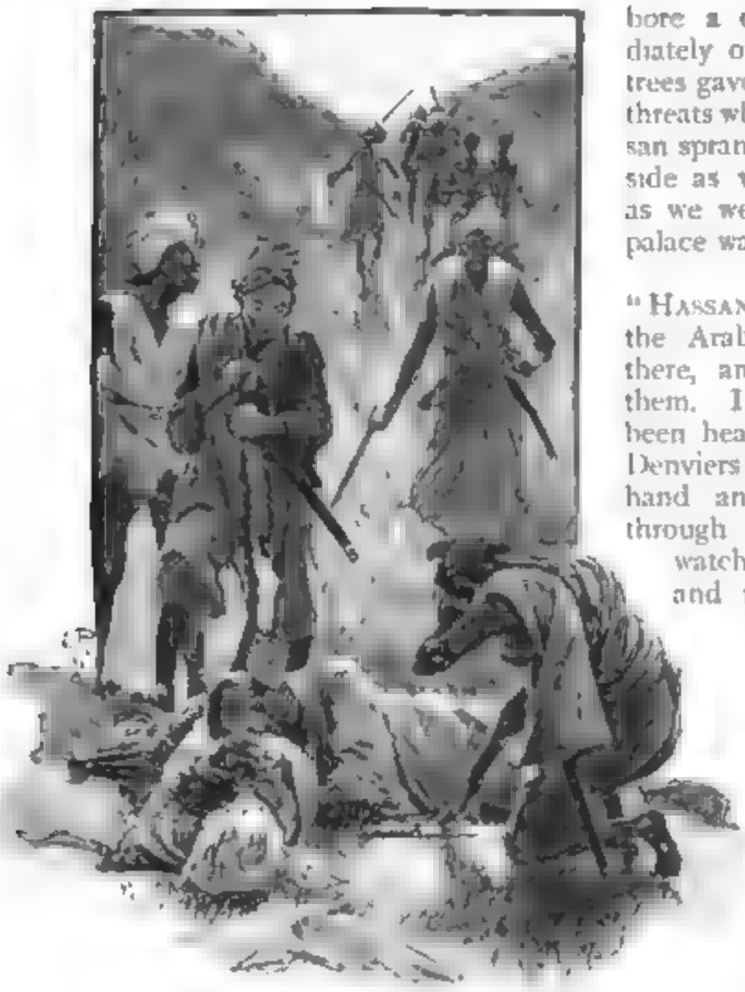
the protecting limestone, then stood at bay to defend the maiden and himself from the advancing foes. Warily they came on, for well they knew the deadly thrusts which he could deal with his keen sword. Yu Chan in fighting at such desperate odds more than once failed to beat down the weapons lunged at him, but though severely wounded he did not flinch from the combat. Three of his assailants lay dead at his feet, when the leader of the monarch's soldiery twisted the sword from Yu Chan's hand, and then the three surviving foes rushed upon the defenceless man. With a cry that pierced the air the maiden flung herself before her lover—to fall dead as her body was thrust through and through by the weapons intended for the heart of Yu Chan!

"Like a boarhound the mountain chief leapt upon his nearest assailant, wrenched the sword dripping with the maiden's blood from his hand, and almost cleaved him in half with one resistless stroke. He turned next upon the remaining two, but they fled headlong down the path, Yu Chan following with a fierce cry at their heels. Into the boat they leapt, nor dared to look behind till they were out in mid-stream, then they saw the wounded chief slowly dragging himself back to where the maiden lay lifeless.

"THE MAIDEN FLUNG HERSELF BEFORE HER LOVER."

"Yu Chan bent despairingly over her as he saw the fatal stains which dyed her garments and reddened some of the fragrant white flowers fallen from her hair, which lay in masses framing her white, still face. Taking up his own sword, he sheathed it; then he raised the maiden gently in his arms, and, covered himself with gaping wounds, he set out to cross the great plain to the Three Hundred Peaks, where his followers awaited his return. On he struggled for two weary days with his lifeless burden; then at last he reached the end of his journey, and as the mountaineers gathered hastily about him and shuddered to see the ghastly face of their chief, Yu Chan tottered and fell dead in their midst!

"Round the two lifeless forms the hunted tribe gathered, and, looking upon them, knew that they had been slain by their remorseless foes. One by one the mountaineers pressed forward, and amid the deathly silence of the others, each in turn touched the sword of their slain chief and sternly swore the blood-revenge. Fierce, indeed, as are such outbreaks in many eastern lands, that day marked the beginning of dark deeds of requitement that have made all others as nothing in comparison to them. The Burmese came down upon Siam and swept over fair Ayuthia, leaving nothing but the ruins of the city; yet, even in that national calamity, the fierce instinct of murder so fatally roused in the breasts of the mountaineers never paused nor seemed dulled. While the magnificent city lay despoiled, the once hunted tribe fell upon the others about the Meinam, and long after peace reigned throughout the country, still their deeds of pillage and



"THEY SWORE THE BLOOD-REVENGE."

massacre went on, as they do even to this day, so remote from the one when their leader was slain.

"For months the tribe will be unheard of, and lulled by a false sense of security the inhabitants of one of these cities will make preparations for one of their recurring festivals. Even in the midst of such the strange cry of the hunted tribe will be heard, and the coming day will reveal to the awe-struck people the evidence of a night attack, in which men and women have been slain or carried off suddenly to the Three Hundred Peaks."

"The present descendants of the avengers of Yu Chan's death are a cowardly lot, at all events," commented Denviers, as the Arab finished his recital: "they attacked us without reason, and have consequently got their deserts. If they come upon us again——"

"Hist, sahib," Hassan whispered cautiously, as he pointed with his sword towards the fantastic bridge of limestone; "the hunted tribe is returning from its raid, see!" We looked in the direction in which he motioned us, and saw that the mountaineers bore a captive in their midst! Immediately one of the prisoners lashed to the trees gave a warning cry, regardless of the threats which Denviers had uttered. Hassan sprang to his feet, and stood by my side as we raised our rifles, still hidden as we were in the shadow of the ruined palace wall.

III.

"HASSAN," whispered my companion to the Arab; "go over to the prisoners there, and if they cry out again shoot them. I don't think that first cry has been heard by the others." As he spoke Denviers thrust a pistol into Hassan's hand and motioned to him to move through the grass towards them. We watched our guide as he neared them and raised the pistol threateningly a silent admonition which they understood, and became quiet accordingly.

From our position in the shadow of the ruined palace wall we saw a number of the hunted tribe slowly wind over the bridge with their captive, and noticed that in addition they had plenty of plunder with them. Noiselessly they moved towards our tent, and completely surrounded it, only to find it empty. They were evidently at a loss what to do, when one of their number stumbled over the dead mountaineer whom I had shot down as he joined in the attack upon us. A fierce exclamation quickly caused the rest to gather about him, and for some minutes they held a brief consultation. We judged from their subsequent actions that they considered we had made good our escape from the plain, for they made no further search for us, but apparently determined to avenge their comrade's death by slaying their captive. While the rest of the band moved away over the plain, two of their number returned towards the limestone bridge spanning the river. Guessing their fell purpose, Denviers and I crept through the tall grass, and under cover of the trees by the bank moved cautiously towards them.

From tree to tree we advanced with our rifles in our hands, then just when within twenty yards of them we stopped aghast at the movements of the two mountaineers, who were forcing their struggling captive slowly towards the edge of the jagged limestone bridge!

We looked down at the angry waters of the rapid, swirling twenty feet below in the deep bed of the river, which was slowly rising each day, for the time of its inundation was near at hand. For a moment I saw a woman's horror-stricken face in the moonlight and heard her agonizing cry, then the sharp crack of Denviers' rifle rang out, and one of her assailants relaxed his grasp. Before Denviers could take a shot at the second mountaineer, he seized the captive woman and deliberately thrust her over the rocky bridge!

"Quick! To the river!" exclaimed Denviers, as we heard the sound of her body striking the waters below. Down the steep bank we scrambled, steadying ourselves by grasping the lithe and dwarfed trees which grew in its rocky crevices. For one brief moment we scanned the seething torrent, and then, right in its midst, we saw the face and floating hair of the woman as she was tossed to and fro in the rapid, while she vainly tried to cling to the huge boulders rising high in the stream through which her fragile form was hurried.

"Jump into the boat and wait for me to be carried down to you!" cried Denviers, and before I fully realized what he was about to do, he flung his rifle down and plunged headlong into the foaming waters. I saw him battling against the fierce current with all his might, for the rocks in mid-stream prevented the woman from being floated down to us and threatened to beat out her life, as she was borne violently against them. I ran madly towards where our boat had been drawn up, and pushing it into the river strained my eyes eagerly in the wild hope of seeing Denviers alive when his body should be floated down towards me.

I pulled hard against the stream and managed to keep the rude craft from being carried away with the current. A few minutes afterwards I saw that my companion had succeeded in dragging the woman from the grinding channels between the rocks, and was being swept on to where I anxiously awaited him with his burden. The water dashed violently against the boat as I put it across the middle of the rushing stream, then dropped the oars as he was flung towards me. I stretched out my arms over the side in order to relieve him of his burden, and, although he was exhausted, Denviers made one last effort and thrust the woman towards me. I dragged her into the boat just as her rescuer sank back. With a quick but steady grip I caught my companion and hauled him in too, and before long had the happiness to see both become conscious once more.

Leaving the boat to float down the stream, I merely steered it clear of the rocky sides of the river channel, then, seeing some distance ahead a favourable place to land, drew in to the shore with a few swift strokes from the oars. Denviers remained with the woman he had rescued, while I climbed the steep bank again and found that the mountaineers had, fortunately, not returned, although we had fully expected the report of Denviers' rifle to cause them to do so. I thereupon signalled to my companion below that all was safe, and he toiled up to the plain supporting the woman, who was a Laos, judging from her garments and slight, graceful form

Spreading for her a couch of skins, we left her reclining wearily in the tent, to which Denviers conducted her, then hastened

towards Hassan, whom we found still keeping guard over our two captives. The Arab, when he heard of the hazardous venture which Denviers had made, stoutly urged us to put our prisoners to death, as a warning to the hunted tribe that their misdeeds could not always be carried on with impunity. For reply Denviers quietly took the pistol from the Arab's hand, and then we returned towards the tent, outside which we rested till day dawned.

The woman within the tent then arose and came towards us, thanking Denviers profusely for saving her from such a death as had confronted her. She told us that her betrothal to a neighbouring prince had taken place only a few days before, but although every precaution had been taken to keep the affair secret, the news was conveyed to the hunted tribe by some one of the many supporters of the mountaineers. As she was a woman of high rank, this seemed to them a suitable opportunity to strike further terror into the hearts of the people inhabiting the cities about the Meinam. Their plans had been thoroughly successful, for they had despoiled several of the richest citizens, slaying those who opposed them, then snatching the woman up, began to carry her off to live among their tribeswomen, and to become one of them, when we fortunately saved her from that fate. We promised to conduct her to the city whence she had been stolen, which we eventually did, but before setting out for that purpose we visited our prisoners again.

"Hassan," said Denviers, "release the men from the trees." The Arab most reluctantly did so, stoutly maintaining that after Mahomet had helped us so strangely and successfully, we would be wiser either to shoot them or leave them bound till someone discovered and dealt with our prisoners as they deserved.

The ropes were accordingly unbound which fastened them to the trees; then Denviers pointed to the distant range of the Three Hundred Peaks and bade them begone. The two prisoners set forward at a run, being not a little surprised at our clemency. When they had at last disappeared in the distance, we moved towards the city beyond Ayuthia to restore the princess to her people, who had, by our means, been snatched from the power of the hunted tribe.

Shafts from an Eastern Quiver.

XI.—IN QUEST OF THE LOST GALLEON.

By Charles J. Mansford, B.A.

I.

"HASSAN," I said to our guide as he rested before us in the shade of the tent, "what was it those coolies lying under the trees yonder told you about Formosa?"

"The sahib shall hear," replied the Arab. "They wish to persuade the Englishmen to hire their junk to visit the island, for they learnt from me that we have met with many strange experiences during our wanderings. They declare that what may be seen in one part of it is almost beyond belief."

"Never mind what they say," I expostulated, "go on and tell us about the island. There ought to be some story concerning it to interest us, considering that the Spaniards, the Dutch, and the Chinese have all possessed it in turn. It is quite notorious for the shipwrecks on its coast, not to mention the pirates who have held it at different times, and the savage tribes said to inhabit its wildest parts."

"Ye shall hear the story, strange indeed as it is," responded the Arab; "and, besides, it partly concerns a Feringhee sailor."

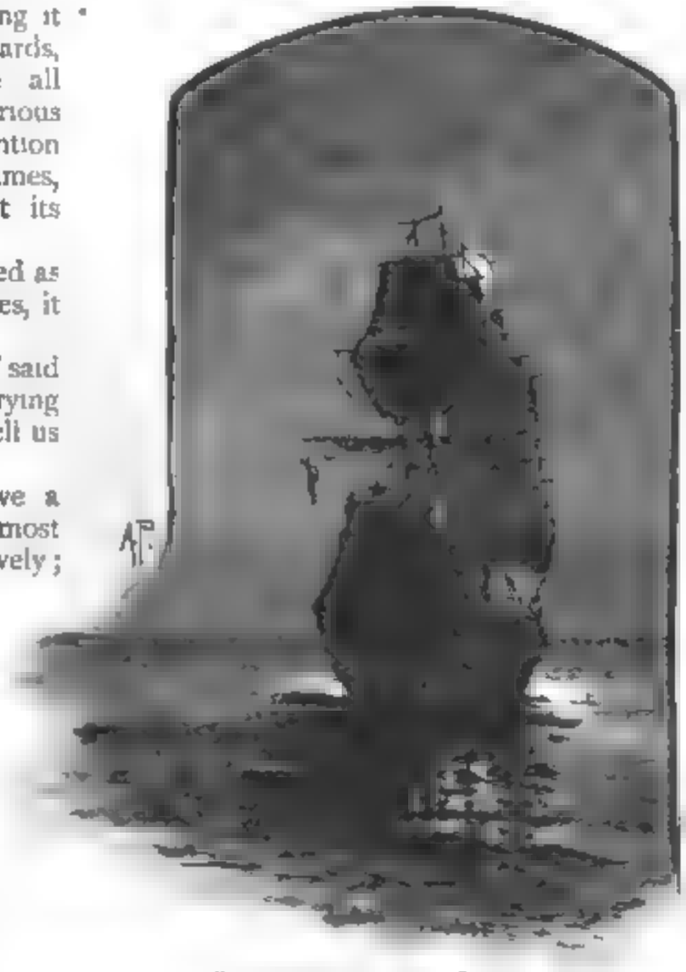
"Well, go on with your yarn, Hassan," said Denviers. "What a nigger you are for trying to excite our interest before you really tell us anything."

"The sahib does not give his slave a chance to continue, but makes always a most indifferent listener," replied the Arab gravely; "and yet the great Mahomet has said that he who is impatient——"

"The story!" I interposed. "Go on, Hassan, you can tell us about Mahomet some other day." Thus abjured, the Arab, after being silent for a few minutes, related to us the strange events which followed the quest of the lost galleon.

Soon after our adventure with the Hunted Tribe of Three Hundred Peaks we left Siam, and sailing through the China Sea made for Hong Kong. Thence we set out to traverse a part of the coast of China, and at this time our tent was pitched not far from Swatow. There Hassan held a conversation with some coolies, when, from the various excited exclamations and gestures both of them and the Arab, my interest was roused sufficiently to question our guide, as narrated. As it afterwards transpired, the coolies had moved away a little only to await our decision, and were resting patiently meanwhile under the shade of a huge umbrella in addition to that afforded by the pine clump.

"Many years ago," began Hassan, "when the far-off people of Spain ruled a great



"THE SPANISH GALLEON."

continent, a galleon laden heavily with treasure wrung from the natives set out to return with its great store under the command of Don Luego, a grandee, whose name was a terror to all those who came under the Spaniard's sway. The riches which the vessel carried were almost incredible, yet Don Luego had no word of praise or thanks for the sailors who toiled to convey it home across the stormy seas.

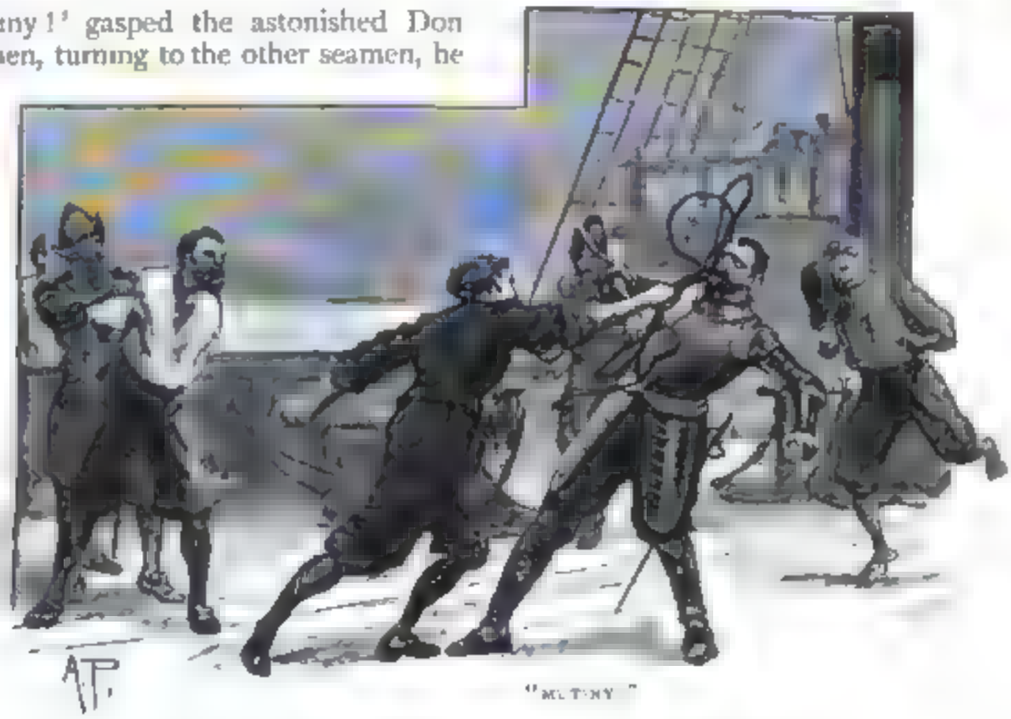
"More than one brave sailor was hung at the yard-arm for venturing to utter incautious expressions against the Spaniard's despotic rule, but at last some of the crew grew strangely silent, and took to watching Luego and conspiring together under the hatches. Among these men was one who had been put in chains several times, and whom the constant fear of death nerved on to lead his disaffected comrades against the commander.

"One morning all hands were piped on deck to witness the execution of a seaman, and José, the leader of the discontented part of the crew, was told off to assist. With a stern-set countenance he stepped forward, pulled the rope from his comrade's neck, and struck the fell Spaniard full in the face with it.

"'Mutiny!' gasped the astonished Don Luego; then, turning to the other seamen, he cried, 'Seize him and swing the two together from the yard-arm!'

"A number of the sailors ran forward, eager to gain favour with their commander by obeying his orders, while the rest hurriedly gathered round the doomed men, and, drawing their keen knives, prepared to defend them. Don Luego unsheathed his sword and rushed forward with a fierce cry, while the mutineers fought hand-to-hand with the other seamen. It was a desperate fray, for the men who had revolted knew their fate if once they became overpowered. On the mutineers pressed over the slippery decks, until at last their disheartened opponents ceased fighting and surrendered.

"Deserted by his men, Don Luego stood alone with his blood-red sword still gripped in his hand, for he expected no mercy from the sailors whom he had driven into rebellion. The chief mutineers gathered in a group and eagerly discussed the fate to be awarded to their defeated commander. Most of them were in favour of putting him to death in the same manner in which he had doomed his seamen; but José, who now headed them, proposed another plan, which eventually was agreed upon. A quantity of provisions and water were got ready, and then Don Luego was seized and disarmed in spite of his struggles. The seamen lowered him in a boat over the side of the galleon, and then, cutting the ropes, cast the fierce commander adrift at the mercy of wind and wave. They watched him as the boat was seen to rise at times on the crest of a huge wave, and saw that he shook at them threateningly his disarmed hand. At last they lost sight of him, and gathered together once more to consider their own plans and what to do with the treasure of the galleon.



"MUTINY!"

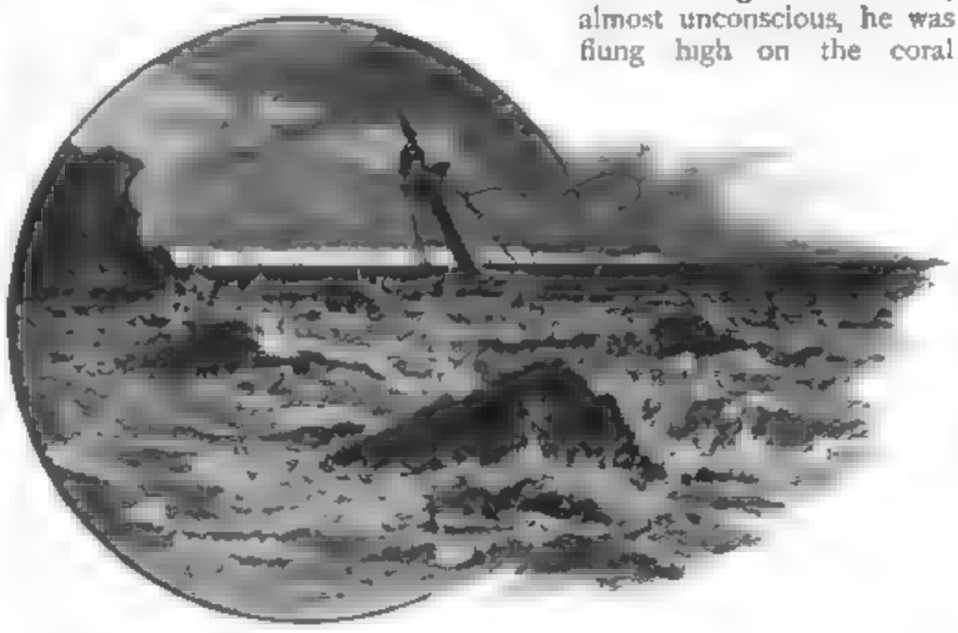
"José, who seemed to be above the lust for gold which sprang up in the hearts of the

other sailors, assumed the command, and bade the men prepare to return to Spain. He thought it best to throw himself and his crew on the mercy of the King, and, delivering up the treasure, to tell of the cruelties of Don Luego. With some reluctance the seamen agreed, and so they took their course homeward. Three days afterwards a sailor on the look-out descried several Spanish caracks to leeward, to which they signalled, and having joined company sailed on together. All the vessels carried bombards and cannons, yet within a week the whole of them, save one, had struck their colours, and nailed to the mast of each was the flag of the capturing enemy, who belonged to the sahibs' nation. The single vessel not taken was the galleon which José commanded, and after it, as it fled through the waves with every stitch of canvas spread, went one of the Feringhee ships.

"It was a long stern chase, for the enemy was determined to capture the galleon, yet so well were the vessels matched in speed that they swept on without any perceptible difference being made in the distance which separated them. Through all their course nothing seemed to hinder the relentless pursuit of the treasure-ship. Many times José cried out to his men to turn the vessel about to grapple with the other for the mastery, but they would not obey, for the Spaniards knew too well how the Feringhees could fight. A violent storm came on in which both ships were partly disabled, but still they went on as best they could before a driving wind, until they were carried from west to east and then driven north into a sea which none of them had seen before.

"Then the Spanish galleon began to slacken and the English ship to draw nearer and nearer by degrees, until one stormy evening the towering crests of the volcanic range which runs through Formosa were visible, although the sailors knew not what the land was named. José called upon his men to run the vessel towards it, and as the pursuers drew still closer in the gloom he determined to be revenged, even at the cost of every Spaniard's life, for the dogged way in which the enemy had hunted him down. He chose, as well as he could distinguish it, that part of the coast which seemed the most rock-bound, and then, slackening his vessel's speed, lured on the other for a time, then suddenly sped ahead as though making for a known harbour. Deceived by this, the ship which chased him followed on, and before even José himself was aware of the outlying reefs of coral, they struck almost together. The next minute Spaniard and Feringhee were struggling for their lives, while tremendous seas were sweeping over the two ill-fated vessels.

"The English ship went down, leaving only part of her mast to be seen, to which for a time a few seamen clung until one by one the waves swept them off, and out of the entire crew only a solitary sailor was left there. The Spanish galleon struck nearer to the coast, and at low water its hull could long afterwards be seen, but not a man aboard was saved. The Feringhee sailor clung to the mast all through that dreary night. Next morning, seizing a floating spar, he struck out for the shore and battled with the seething waters until, almost unconscious, he was flung high on the coral beach. Towards sunset the seaman rose, and struggling forward to the entrance of one of the caves before him, he flung himself down to sleep.



"ONLY A SOLITARY SAILOR WAS LEFT."

"The coolies say that the sailor after-

wards explored a part of the coast and then set about making his presence known to any vessel which might chance to pass the island. Getting possession of part of the broken mast of one of the ships, he raised it on the beach, and hoisted to the top of it the tattered flag of the English vessel, which chanced to be flung up by the waves. For weeks and months his signal passed unnoticed; and meanwhile the sailor made a raft, and at low water reached the hulk of the Spanish ship several times, from which by degrees he carried away the treasure. This he hid in the cave which he occupied, hoping that one day he would be rescued. He found arms and ammunition in the galleon in abundance, and well it was for him that he secured them and made them serviceable in case of need.

"Lying before the cave one day he saw the dusky forms of several savages appear, at which the sailor immediately seized the nearest Spanish musket and prepared to defend himself. In a moment they discovered him and cast a shower of spears towards the entrance of the cave. The Feringhee shouldered his loaded muskets in turn and picked the savages off one at a time in quick succession, and despite their onsets he managed for a time to keep them at bay. At last they gathered together and made a desperate attack upon the cave, while the undaunted sailor clubbed them with the butt of a musket as fast as they came upon him. Then they withdrew and left him to pass the night watching and waiting for the assault to be renewed, but this was not attempted. Next day one of the savages appeared alone and unarmed, making signs which indicated that the tribe desired peace.

"Not only was this goodwill maintained, but the chief of the fierce islanders, full of admiration for the sailor's bravery, treated him with marked respect, and when more than a year had passed, during which no vessel apparently sighted the fluttering flag at the top of the broken mast, the seaman became almost reconciled to his strange fate, and took the chief's daughter as his wife. Watching from the beach one day, long after this, the sailor saw a vessel, and climbing up the mast seized the flag and raised frantic cries for rescue; for on seeing a ship once more his old longing to leave the island at once returned. Anxiously he watched, and then saw a flag run up to the mast of the ship, which told him that his signal had been observed—then the dull roar of cannon rang out over the waters. The vessel tacked and soon bore down towards the island, the sailor madly waving the tattered flag and uttering exclamations of delight, for he was almost beside himself at the near prospect of rescue.

"The vessel was brought to at some little distance from the island and a boat sent out, which was carefully steered through the breakers. Forgetting the treasure which he had concealed in the cave, and the friendly treatment which he had so long received from the tribe who knew of its whereabouts, the sailor rushed into the surf, and throwing himself into the boat bade the men pull back to the ship. When he was standing on the deck of the latter he recognised fully his own position. Above him floated the Spanish flag, fierce glances of hatred from all the crew were turned upon him, and to complete his discomfiture the commander who came forward to meet him was none other than Don Luego, of whom every Feringhee sailor had heard.

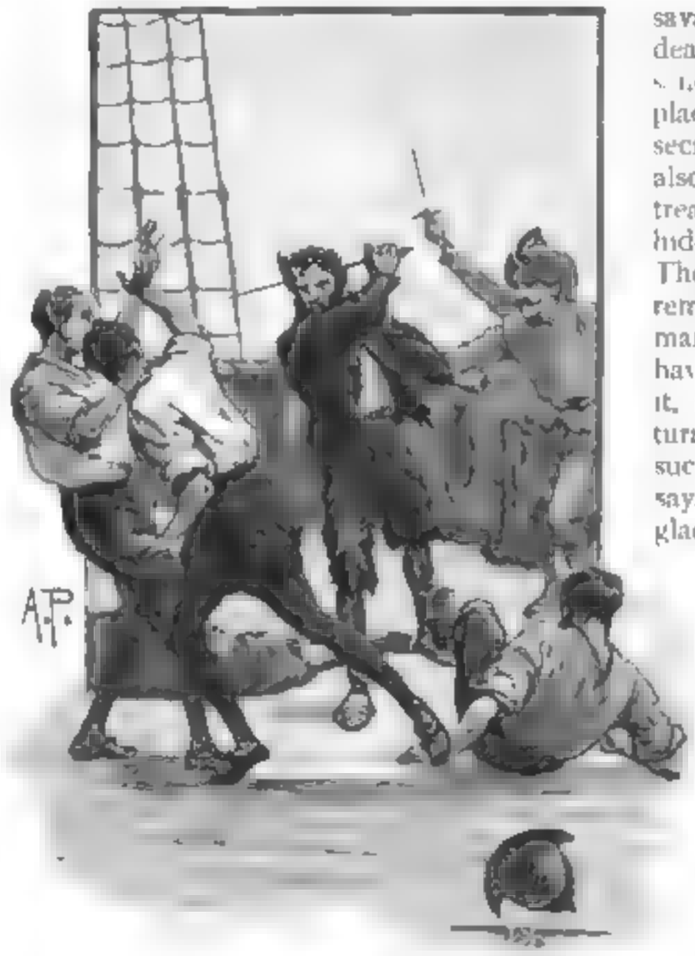
"Cast adrift by the crew of the galleon which he had commanded, Don Luego had been rescued and carried to Spain by a trading vessel, by which he chanced to be observed after suffering terrible privations at sea. He made his way into the King's presence, told his own tale of the mutiny of his sailors, and persuaded the monarch to put him in command of a fast vessel with which to return and, hunting them down, to restore the great treasure to the Spanish coffers. Strange rumours were heard by him when again in the southern seas of the galleon having been seen flying before the wind with another vessel pursuing it. After cruising about for a considerable time he had quite unknowingly come within sight of the island where the English vessel and the Spanish galleon had both been wrecked.

"Pretending that hostilities had long ceased between the two nations, Don Luego endeavoured to get the rescued man to relate the story of his shipwreck; but the seaman, conscious of his danger, gave evasive answers, and asked to be landed upon the island once more. The Spaniard's suspicions were aroused, and he determined to keep the sailor on board as his prisoner while a number of men were sent ashore to see if anything could be discovered. They soon come back and reported that upon the beach they had seen portions of wreckage which had evidently formed part of a Spanish galleon. The Feringhee seaman was strictly questioned by the commander, but at first would say nothing. Stung at length by Don Luego's taunts, he pointed towards the tattered flag which still

floated from the broken mast, and declared that it waved over a treasure belonging no longer to Spain but to him.

"Don Luego responded by threatening the hardy sailor with death unless he pointed out where the contents of the lost galleon were concealed. The seaman suddenly sprang forward, wrenched the sword from his interrogator's hand, and, cutting a way through the surprised Spaniards, flung himself headlong from the vessel's side, and struck out for the shore.

"'Shoot him, men!' cried Don Luego, as the sailor's head emerged for a minute from the water, and instantly a volley from a hundred muskets whistled round the swimmer's head. He dived at once and swam under water, only coming up to take breath occasionally. A second and a third time the muskets were discharged, and then the savages—who had meanwhile gathered in a threatening band at the water's edge, on hearing the strange reports ring out—saw the sailor flung upon the coral beach. They bent over him, then raised a wild cry for vengeance, for the waves had cast at their feet the blood-stained body of the lifeless seaman.



"CUTTING HIS WAY THROUGH THE SPANIARDS.

"Landing from their boats, the Spaniards tried to force the natives from the shore, but were driven back time after time at the point of the savages' spears, till disheartened they leapt into their boats again and made for the vessel. Foremost among the wild horde which fought so desperately to avenge the murdered sailor was the daughter of the chief—for among this tribe the women fight in battle no less than the men. Her spear it was which pierced the traitorous Don Luego through as he led on the Spaniards.

"Soon after the ship sailed away the savages took up their dead, and carrying the sailor's body away they placed it in some secret spot, whither also they conveyed the treasure which he had hidden near the shore. There it is said to remain still, for though many daring explorers have set out to find it, none have ever returned to speak of their success, so the coolies say. Yet they would gladly convey the sahibs to the island and help them to overcome the savage tribe still living there, for they are bold seamen, and do not fear fighting whatever enemies may appear."

"I daresay," commented Denviers, with a glance of amusement at the coolies still shading themselves with the umbrella, "they would willingly go with us until the first savage appeared, then they would jump into the junk and make off, leaving us to defend ourselves as best we knew how. I have not the slightest objection to setting out for Formosa, but we will see to the craft ourselves and not trust to them. What is your opinion, Harold?"

"Let us go, by all means," I answered. "Between us we can manage the junk very well, and if we act cautiously we may come across this strangely hidden treasure; at all events, we might try."

Hassan was accordingly dispatched to the coolies to tell them what course we had decided to follow, and after some bargaining the junk was placed at our disposal. Before many hours had passed we were on our way to Formosa, little knowing what a strange adventure was in store for us, or how perilous a task we had so lightly undertaken. Before commencing our journey we carefully questioned the coolies as to where it was rumoured the treasure had been secreted, and, learning this, provided ourselves with everything we thought necessary for the enterprise. Our

tent and possessions were left in charge of a wealthy mandarin, whom we fortunately met at Swatow, while we looked to the state of our weapons, for we fully expected to need them in the adventure before us.

II.

"I THINK these Formosans are altogether too friendly, Harold," said Denviers, as we eventually reached the rough coast to which we had been directed, and our boat was being dragged through the blinding surf by a dozen fierce-looking savages.

"The sahibs need not fear," interposed Hassan, as he overheard this remark; "it is necessary that we should be led by them, for not otherwise could we see Wimpai, who is their head-man, so the coolies told me."

"I expect we could have managed very well without seeing him," I replied. "Would it not have been possible to have found the sailor's treasure, wherever it is hidden, without landing at a spot where these savages were evidently on the look-out?"

"Not so, by Mahomet!" answered the Arab. "The sahibs would certainly be slain if they attempted to do so without Wimpai permitted them."

"Well, come on then," said Denviers, as he made his way through the wreckage and huge fragments of coral lying on the beach: "I daresay we shall get out of this adventure as safely as we have others. Our new acquaintances are certainly making themselves quite at home with our possessions, before being invited even," he added, as four of them placed on their heads some pieces of cloth and a native basket filled with handsome beads, which Hassan had advised us to bring in order to propitiate Wimpai.

"They seem to consider us their prisoners," I remarked, as the savages marched on the right and left of us, while we strode on with our rifles shouldered.

"I don't relish the look of their knives," commented Denviers; "they are likely to do us far more harm with them than with the clumsy matchlocks which they now carry instead of spears. What a splendid set of fellows they are!"

The savages who inhabited this part of Formosa, so much avoided on account of its dangerous coral reefs, wore only a blue loincloth. Their hair was adorned with a number of brightly-coloured feathers, while across the shoulder of each passed a strip of scarlet cloth, reaching to the waist, supporting a plaited loop, into which was thrust the long-bladed knife which my companion mentioned.

For some time the tangled pathway which we traversed wound up the steep side of a mountain spur, running almost down to the edge of the raised coral beach. Forcing our way through the screw-pine, which obstructed us, we were soon passing under the shade of some bamboos and banyans, when Denviers motioned to some trees a little way ahead, and suddenly exclaimed:—

"Look out, Harold! These savage niggers mean mischief!"

I glanced carefully to where my companion directed me, and saw a number of matchlocks pointed at us, while the heads of those who held them peered cautiously forth. We raised our rifles to defend ourselves, for we were completely covered by the shining barrels of the enemy, and for a moment fully expected that the lighted port-fires would be applied to their old-fashioned weapons. Seeing that we were closely guarded by the others from any attempt to escape, the savages came out from their lurking-places and advanced to meet us.

"It looks as if Hassan's incredible yarn is going to turn out true after all," said Denviers to me, aside; "at all events, there are several women carrying arms among those in front."

Upon getting close to us the savages passed on one side, and giving a fierce yell of triumph as they did so, turned and followed behind, while our guides or captors still inclosed us, except one of them who led the way. The burden-bearers soon after this disappeared, and we saw no more of the presents which we had brought.

"I expect we are in for it," said Denviers, as the savage led us towards a narrow gap in the heart of the mountain up which we had been toiling. Through this a number of the men passed in single file, and we were bidden to follow them. We halted irresolutely and turned round, only to see the wild horde pressing on behind, impatient at our delay.

"We must go on," said Denviers, "for we are completely surrounded."

The Arab pressed forward, anxious to be the first to test whatever danger confronted us, but my companion prevented this, and Hassan was compelled to take second place, while I followed him. We were absolutely in the dark before we had proceeded a dozen yards through the cleft in the mountain side, and then our worst fears were realized.

I heard a warning cry from Denviers, followed by Hassan's fierce answer, as the savages gathered closely about us where the passage or cave must have widened out, and

"I FELT THE GRIP OF A HAND UPON MY THROAT."

then I felt the grip of a hand upon my throat and saw even in the gloom the fierce glitter of my enemy's eyes. With a thud I brought my rifle down, and the blow evidently told, for my throat was released, while the one who had attacked me fell heavily to the ground.

Of all the adventures which we had met with, that one, during those few minutes of desperate fighting for our lives in the blackness about us, seemed the most weird and exciting. Once I heard the ring of the Arab's sword as it struck against the side of the rocky excavation, and a call to Mahomet for help came from his lips, while through it all Denviers was cheering us madly on in the blind conflict with our foes. I felt my rifle wrenched at last from my hands, and drawing a pistol from my belt thrust it between the glaring eyes of a savage and fired, sending him down at my feet. In a second that weapon too was snatched from me, and feeling hastily for the other I found it gone! Still another savage faced me, and I struck blindly at him with my fist, dealing a stunning blow which sent him spinning and laid my knuckles bare. With all my might I struggled to keep off the rope or thong which I felt was being bound about me, but the odds were too great, and with my arms lashed tightly to my sides I was dragged forward, wondering what fate was in store and why the savages did not kill us outright with their knives. Evidently that was not their purpose, for as soon as I was helplessly bound no more blows were rained upon me, nor did my captors attempt to inflict further injuries.

How long I was hauled through the gloomy passage in the mountain would be difficult to conjecture, but eventually a stifling heat seemed to penetrate to where I was being hurried along, and a dull red glow appeared ahead which lit up the scene, showing what had happened and where we were. Denviers and Hassan were both bound, the latter having one of his arms left loose, from which circumstance I concluded that it was broken, and this was subsequently found to be true.

The glowing mass ahead increased in its intensity, and cast strange shadows of the savages upon the jagged walls of rock which inclosed us on each side and rose to a height of more than twenty feet at the point we had then reached. We drew near to each other as we emerged into the lighter part of the mountain passage, and the savages ceased to drag us along, since they could watch our movements.

"We ought to be glad these niggers didn't try conclusions with their knives in that fight in the dark," said Denviers, as I got close to him and the Arab. Then, observing the latter's injured arm, he added: "You seem to have got the worst of the encounter with one of them, Hassan "

"Not so, by the Koran!" answered the Arab, promptly. "He who dealt that blow felt the edge of my sword, and lived but a second after he did it."

"Where are we being taken to, do you think, Hassan?" I asked, looking in surprise at the changing colours of the walls of the passage, which just there were tinted a bluish-grey, then crimsoned a little further on, until the long cave seemed to terminate in an enormous

hollow surrounded by blood-red rocks which rose precipitously upwards.

"The sahib will soon see for himself," answered the Arab. "The savage tribe has chosen a safe retreat where none would expect to find living people, for, see! before us is the jagged side of a crater!"

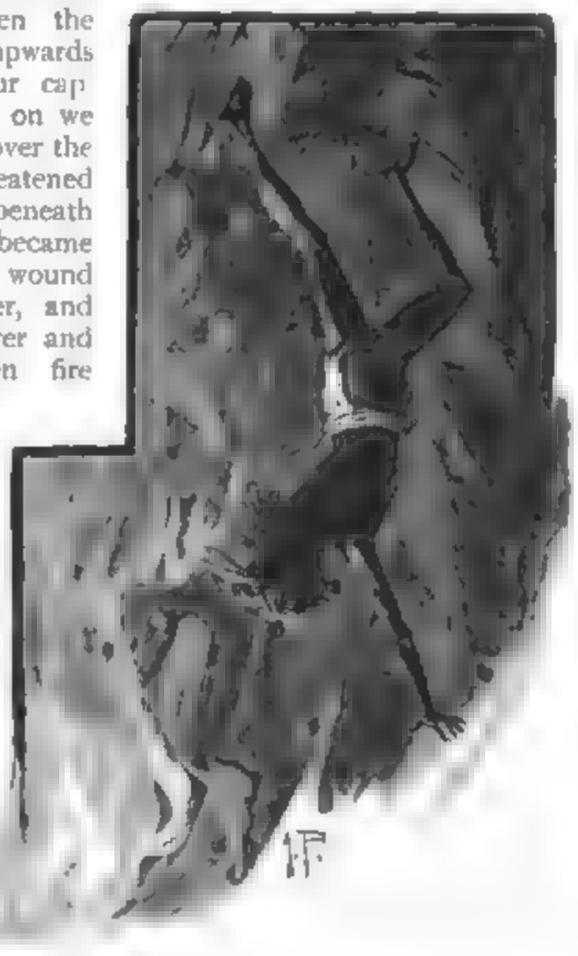
We emerged from the cave to observe in front of us the cause of the intense heat which had been so oppressive while we were in it. A white cloud of smoke rose from the funnel-like hollow, and occasionally flickering red flames shot up and turned this to the same hue, while at times the cloud wore a blue colour, matching the changing tints of the lake of fire below. Round the interior of the great crater in which we were ran a rugged path of broken masses of rock, between which streams of lava lay, and over them we had to pass. Even as we went along, scarcely able to breathe, we saw a huge fragment of rock crash down into the depths below. This was followed by a grinding sound and a rumble like thunder; then high above us shot a shower of red hot lava and stones, while we crouched under a projecting shelf of black basalt, and forgot that we were prisoners in the midst of such an impressive scene. When the stream of fire which darted upwards had somewhat subsided, our captives urged us forward, and on we went, tumbling and slipping over the dangerous rocks, which threatened every instant to give way beneath our feet. Even the savages became exceedingly cautious as we wound our way around the crater, and seemed to be getting nearer and nearer still to the molten fire below.

As he turned round for a moment to see if we were following, the foremost of our captors missed his footing, and, bound as we were, none of us could make an attempt to save him. Uttering an appalling cry of horror, he fell head first into the roaring furnace! We flung ourselves upon our faces and tried to shut out that weird scream of terror; then Denviers, prone as he was, worked his body forward upon a loose, overhanging rock, and stared down into the red sea of fire below.

"The sahib is mad! Come back, come back!" cried Hassan, excitedly; whereupon the savages, looking more like demons than men, as their faces were lighted up by the glow of the lambent flames, seized hold of my companion and dragged him from threatening death.

"He has not fallen right in," said Denviers to me, calmly, as though his own danger had been a mere nothing; "the man is clinging to a projecting crag just above the flames. Hassan," he cried to our guide, "tell these savages if they will unbind me I think I can save him."

Half stupefied with fear and horror, our captors unbound the long rope which held my companion's arms to his sides, and at once he made a loop at one end of it and advanced again upon the projecting rock. Quickly the rope was lowered and, leaning right over, Denviers managed to reach the almost senseless man, for we saw him hauling the rope slowly in, and finally the head of the savage appeared before us, while the loose rock which upheld rescuer and rescued swayed ominously upon the solid mass which supported it. Scarcely were the two of them dragged back from the rock when over it went, and again a fierce shower of fire shot up, from which with much difficulty we protected ourselves.



"HE FELL HEAD FIRST"

The savage lay scorched and motionless for several minutes, then, struggling to his feet, he took one of the knives which another proffered and cut Hassan's bonds as well as my own. Again we moved forward and, conscious that this unexpected rescue of their companion had won for us the goodwill of

all, we passed on, hoping that when we faced Wimpai, their chief, it would be turned to good account. Freed from our bonds so unexpectedly, we went on with more confidence than before, and at last saw another huge cavern facing us, upon entering which we found ourselves in the presence of the savage chief.

III.

We were not able to observe what the entire number of the savages was, since the cave into which we went led to several others where we caught glimpses of many of the wild tribe. We estimated that those among whom we were amounted to about five hundred, more than a half of whom were female warriors. Our appearance was the signal for the savages to raise excited cries, which continued till we stood before Wimpai, who was partly surrounded by a number of his armed women. The chief of our captors, who had received several severe burns and injuries through his fall, pressed forward, and telling first of our fight in the rocky passage, afterwards spoke of his own rescue by Denviers, so we learnt from Hassan. Wimpai rose and leant upon his spear when the savage had concluded his account, and was evidently perplexed as to what course to pursue.

Hassan managed to explain our purpose in visiting the chief, and with an immobile countenance asked for us to be shown the hidden treasure, a request which brought forth a shrill laugh from those around. We could not understand what passed between Wimpai and the Arab, but the latter succeeded in producing a favourable effect by his persuasive words, for he turned to us eventually, saying:—

"Wimpai declares that between his tribe and those who carry the dragon banner to war there has been of late much fighting, which is the reason his people have sought this strange shelter."

"I should have thought these niggers could tell the difference between us and Chinamen," interposed Denviers.

"That is so," responded the Arab; "but the sahib forgets that in the memory of every wild tribe those who have injured them are never forgotten. Finding that we were not like the people with whom they have recently been fighting, those who took us prisoners thought we were the descendants of the fell Spaniards whom their traditions recall. I have told Wimpai that ye are of the same nation as the Feringhee sailor who married the daughter of one of their chiefs so long ago, and he promises that we shall see the treasure, and may take as much of it as we can bear away. Even now a boat is being got ready for us to enter, and a warrior woman is to accompany us down the strange stream which leads to the place where the contents of the galleon have long been hidden."

As the Arab finished speaking, we saw a woman approach, bearing a torch. Obedient to Wimpai's command, she moved towards one of the rocky passages, and motioned to us to follow. We advanced in single file behind our strange guide, and soon found ourselves in another of the great fissures, which seemed to traverse the heart of the volcano in all directions. Before us, by the light of the flaring torch, we saw a wide stream flowing between lava walls, the lofty top of these meeting far above our heads, and supporting long crystal prisms of a yellowish hue, which hung down in thousands.

"WE SAW A WOMAN APPROACH."

The woman who was appointed to guide us pointed to where the native boat had been placed, and into it we leapt, eager to see the treasure taken from the lost galleon. Although there were two pairs of oars of peeled wood ready to hand, we had no occa

sion to use them, for the underground river carried us along with its steady current. We each held aloft a blazing torch, which the female warrior had thrust into our hands before she took her seat in the prow of the boat, where she sat facing us.

For more than an hour we passed on, watching the shifting lights of that wonderful scene, and the grey mist that stole upwards from the hot spring down which our little craft was floating fast.

At last we saw several narrow channels into which the stream was divided by its rocky bed, and down one of these we passed in devious turns until our new-found guide rose again in the boat and pointed to a jagged fissure which faced us. Denviers seized a pair of the rude oars and pulled the boat towards it, then leaping out he secured our frail conveyance, after which the woman handed to him a fresh torch, and we all advanced into the cave before us, vaguely wondering what treasure would be revealed to us.

All doubts as to the truth of the wreck of the richly-laden galleon off the coast about which Hassan had told us vanished as soon as ever we entered there. The various things which had formed the cargo of the vessel lay strewed in confused heaps about us. There were wedges of gold and bars of silver, discoloured by the fumes from the crater and the mists from the hot stream, while Spanish muskets, strange-looking pistols, and swords with richly-chased handles, and rust-incrusted barrels and blades lay about in piles. Among these weapons I observed a pair of pistols with gems studding their handles, and thrust them into my sash, besides a splendid sword, which proved very serviceable when polished up, especially as my own defensive arms had been taken away.

Hassan and Denviers followed my example, and then the latter remarked :—

"We may as well make the most of Wimpal's permission to enrich ourselves," and he raised several wedges of gold, which he proceeded to carry towards the entrance of the cave. Hassan and I assisted to load the boat, then we threw in a few more weapons which we thought might prove useful to us, and with a look of regret at the wealth we were forced to leave behind us we turned to leave the place. Just then Hassan moved away from us to another part of the cave, and a moment afterwards he called out to us. Going over to him, we found the Arab and the tribeswoman both looking intently at something lying upon the rocky floor.

"Every word of Hassan's singular story is undoubtedly true," I said to Denviers, in sheer amazement, as we stooped over the object and observed it in the torch-light. The wild tribe had carried and placed the slain sailor by the spoils of the galleon which he had claimed for his own in the very face of Don Luego, the Spanish commander.

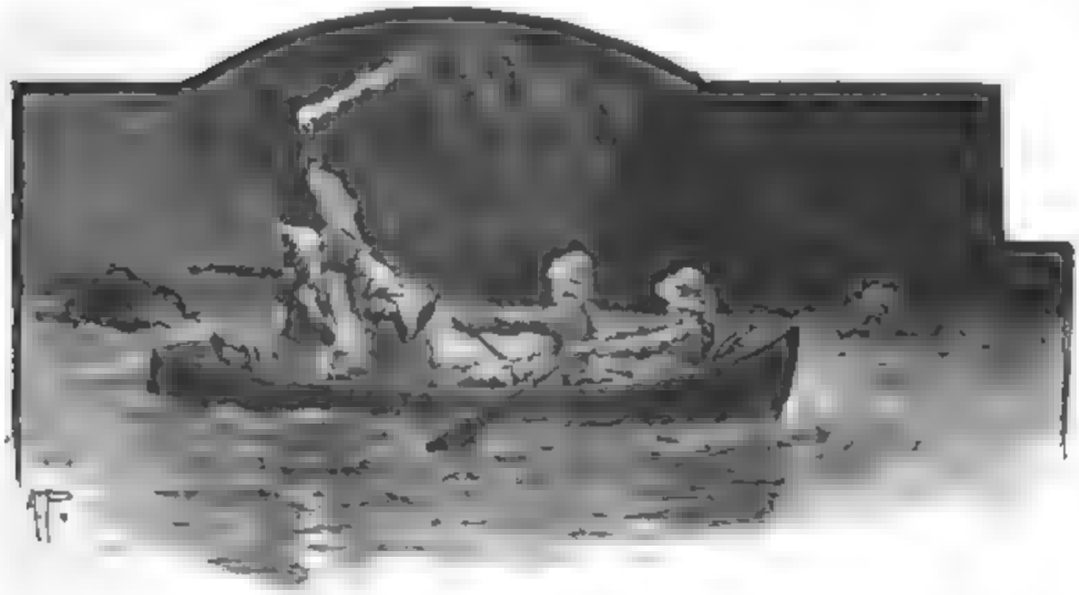
There, before our eyes, was stretched the outline of a human form, above which was spread all that remained of the tattered flag that once had fluttered from the masthead of the ship which chased the Spanish galleon, and went down with it on the coral reefs of the Formosan shore!

Slowly we moved away from the spot towards where our boat was, and re-entered it. The task which we had undertaken, however—that of pulling against the stream, with such a weight of treasure as we had obtained -proved a most difficult one. Indeed, Denviers and I exerted ourselves to little purpose for some time, then found that the boat was slowly making headway. We reached the spot where the underground stream divided into its several channels, and then, by an unlucky accident, the prow of our craft was dashed against one of the many rocks which lay between. For a minute we entirely lost control of it, and back it drifted down one of the other channels. At this the female warrior rose, and thrusting the head of her long spear against the rock tried to assist us to get the boat back into the main stream before us. Our efforts were made in vain, for the bed of the narrow channel into which we had got sloped rapidly down, and its waters hurried us along at a speed which defied all our attempts to force the boat back. The woman had dropped her torch when she came to our assistance, and in the light of the solitary one still flaring, as Hassan held it, I saw a look upon her face which startled me. She pointed before us, uttering a wild, despairing cry, which was drowned a moment after in a dull roar which struck upon our ears.

"Pull, sahibs; in Allah's name, pull!" cried Hassan, who was looking ahead at the danger which we faced. "If the boat cannot be stopped from drifting on before a few more hundred yards are gone over, we are lost!"

We gripped the rude oars again, and strained till our arms ached, but still the relentless current bore us on. I gave another glance at the danger ahead, then Hassan wildly exclaimed :—

"Allah and Mahomet help us! We are on the verge of a cataract!"



"ON THE VERGE OF A CATARACT!"

"Throw the treasure overboard!" cried Denviers, and each of us worked desperately to free the boat of what we had been so eager to obtain. Into the stream we cast the wedges of gold and Spanish arms, and scarcely had our purpose been accomplished, when the boat, lightened of its heavy cargo, was caught up by the rushing stream, swirled round, and then borne madly forward at a rate which brought another despairing cry from the woman's lips.

"Pull with all your might with the stream, Harold!" said Denviers to me, as we drew close to where the roaring waters were leaping down. "Pull, pull, it is our last chance!"

We both knew that if we failed to shoot the rapid ahead we should be sucked down and drowned. We tugged at the oars together, then amid a cloud of blinding spray our boat seemed to hover for a moment over the tumbling waters, then shot forward and left the danger behind.

"We are saved, thank Allah!" cried Hassan, and as we ventured to look round we saw the wonderful escape which had been ours. Swiftly we were carried along by the stream, which began to widen out as it passed between the precipitous sides of a vast ravine.

"Daylight at last!" I exclaimed, with a feeling of relief. "I wonder where we are now being hurried towards."

For a considerable time the stream kept on its rapid course, then grew less violent, and we floated down it gently at last, until we were carried to where we saw the river flowing into the sea, when we at once sprang out upon the rough coral beach.

The Formosan woman hastened away along the shore, making for the distant cave by which we first entered into the strange haunt of her tribe, while we followed slowly after her, having drawn the rude boat high up on the beach.

"Well!" said Denviers, when at last we found our junk, after walking several miles along the coast, and prepared to launch it into the sea in order to leave the island. "We lost the treasure after all, but still we have something left to recall this strange adventure at times," and he drew from his sash the Spanish sword which he had thrust there. After examining it I passed to him the arms which I had taken from the cave. The pistols, although proving useless, were fine specimens of workmanship, and as richly chased as the jewel-studded hilt of the sword which I had also obtained.

"Mahomet has well rewarded the sahibs with such treasures," interposed Hassan, gravely, "and has not forgotten their slave." We glanced towards his waist as he spoke, and saw that the Arab had certainly taken care to arm himself well from the treasures of the lost galleon, for he bristled with swords and poniards like a small armoury.

"Come on, Hassan," said Denviers, with an amused smile at the Arab's weapons, "Mahomet evidently looks with high favour upon you."

We pushed the junk through the surf, then entering it, put out for the distant coast of the mainland, which we reached in safety.

Shafts from an Eastern Quiver.

XII.—THE DAUGHTER OF LOVETSKI THE LOST.

By Charles J. Mansford, B.A.

I.

"OUR journey seems to have no end, Harold," remarked Denviers, as he lashed the horses which drew our sledge over the dreary plain; "for a week we have been pressing on, night and day almost, in the hope of coming across the hut near the road over which the exiles pass. If that mujik told us the truth, we certainly ought to have seen it by this time."

"We have had a long, desolate ride since we parted with him," I assented; "yet the snow lies in such drifts at times that we can hardly be surprised to find ourselves still driving onwards."

"See, sahibs!" exclaimed Hassan, as he pointed to where the snow-clad plain was at last broken by a distant forest of stunted pines. "There is surely the landmark of which the mujik spoke, and the peasant woman's dwelling cannot be far off."

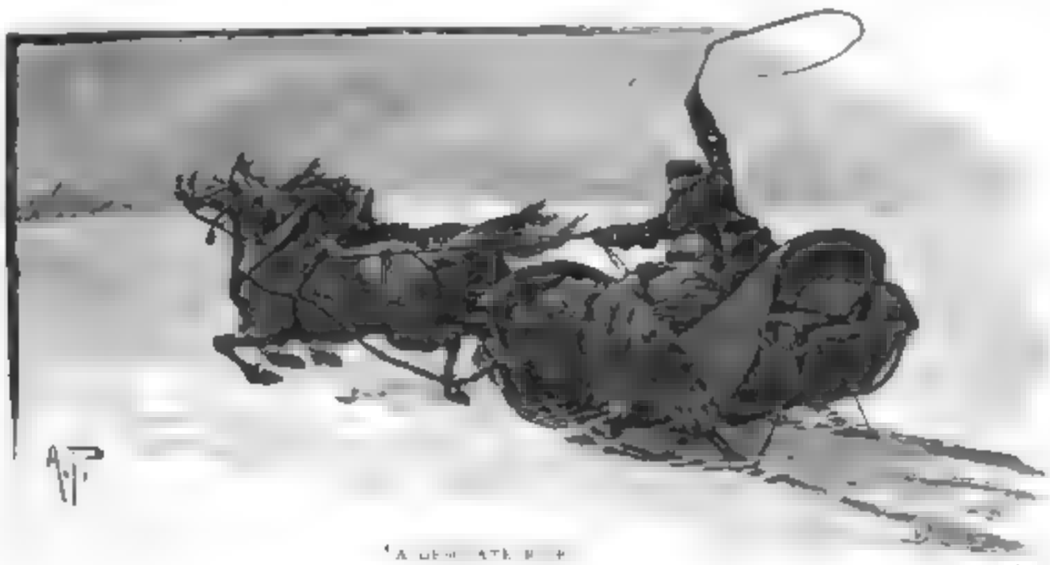
After wandering through the outlying provinces of China, we determined to visit the vast plains beyond, being anxious to see a Russian mine. To all our requests for such permission we met with refusals, until Denviers pressed a number of roubles into the hand of an official, who eventually helped us to effect our purpose, after evincing some reluctance. Staying a few days after this at a peasant's hut, we had been fortunate enough to win his goodwill, and it was in consequence of what he told us that we promised to undertake our present expedition.

No sooner did the keen eyes of Hassan discover the forest far ahead than we dashed onwards quicker than ever, as our exhaled breath froze in icy particles and the biting wind struck right through the heavy sheepskin wraps which we had purchased on entering Russia. Away across the snow our foam-flecked horses sped, until we saw the blue smoke curling upward in the frosty air from a low log hut, situated so that the pine forest sheltered it somewhat from the icy winds.

"Someone evidently lives here," said Denviers, as he beat with the handle of his whip against the low door. We heard a footstep cross the floor, then the noise of a bar being removed as a woman opened the door cautiously and peered into our faces. Bent as she was with age, with hair that hung in white masses about her shoulders, there was an unsubdued look which rested upon us from her dark eyes that contrasted forcibly with the dull, patient glance of the average Russian peasant.

"Who is it crossing the plains? Are you servants of the Czar?" she asked, in a tone of hesitation at our unexpected appearance, and glancing strangely at Hassan, who had secured our steeds and joined us.

"We are travellers crossing the Siberian



wastes with our guide, and come to you for shelter," I answered, although we had a deeper purpose in visiting her.

"It is yours," the woman replied, and having shaken our sheepskin wraps, we entered the hut and accepted the invitation to gather about the pine-wood fire which burnt in one corner of the rude dwelling.

"You are not a Russian peasant?" remarked Denviers, in a tone of inquiry, for the woman spoke English with some fluency.

"I am not, for my people are the Lost Ones, of whom you may have heard," she answered, with a dreary smile.

"We do not understand you," Denviers responded, as we waited for her explanation.

"If you were men of this country my words would be lucid enough. Among all those who were overcome in the many Polish struggles for liberty, none have ever returned who once trod the road by which the exiles passed to join those whom we call Our Lost."

"You have a motive for living here?" I remarked quietly, watching attentively to see what effect my words would have upon her.

"I am friendless and alone, choosing rather to dwell here within sight of the way to Tomsk, than in the great city from which I came. The Czar is merciful, and permits this."

"Then the mujik who directed us here was mistaken," I persisted. "He related strange stories to us of fugitives, whom the peasants whisper——"

"Hush!" she cried, looking nervously round. "What was the mujik's name?" For reply I placed in her hand a scrap of paper, upon which the man had scrawled a message. She glanced keenly at us after reading the missive, then answered:—

"He may be mistaken in you, for you are Englishmen, and do not understand these things. A piece of black bread—what is it that it should be denied to an enemy, even of the Czar, who has escaped from the mines and wanders for refuge over these frozen wastes?"

"You may trust us fully in this matter," said Denviers. "We have given our word to the mujik to render all the help we can."

"It is a terrible day to traverse the plain," the woman replied, as she rose and threw open the rough door to the icy blast, which was only imperfectly kept out before. We followed to where she stood, then watched as she raised her hand and pointed at a distant object.

"See!" the woman cried, bitterly; "yonder pine cross marks the spot where a brave man fell, he who was the lover of the daughter of Lovetski, one of our Lost Ones. By it, before the day is ended, will pass the long train of exiles guarded by the soldiery and headed by the one who hates to see that monument of his own misdeeds, but fears to remove it, for, persecuting the living, he dreads the dead." She closed and barred the door again; then, after some hesitation, spoke of the one to help whom we had gone so far.

"It was the night of a masquerade at the Winter Palace, long to be remembered by many, for on the following day another rising of the Poles had been planned to take place. A number of the leading citizens of St. Petersburg were involved in it, but so well apparently was their secret kept, that they ventured to accept the invitations issued to them. Amid the mad revel the plotters moved, making occasionally a furtive sign of recognition to each other, or venturing at times to whisper as they passed the single word which told of all their hopes and fears —'To-morrow!' Chief among them was Count Lovetski, who murmured the watch-word more hopefully than any of those concerned whenever his keen eyes searched out those sworn to take part in the revolt so near at hand.

"For three hours the gay crowd moved through the salons, then Lovetski, as he leant against a carved pillar, saw one of the revellers who was clad in strange attire approach several of the masqueraders and smilingly whisper something in their ears. At last the Count saw the stranger move close to himself, and a moment after he heard a mocking laugh from behind the black mask, as the unknown one stooped and uttered the preconcerted word. Lovetski looked doubtfully at the man's sombre garb, for the glance from his eyes was by no means reassuring.

"'To-morrow!' repeated the masker. 'Count Lovetski, you do not respond. Have you forgotten?'

"'Lower your voice, or we shall be heard by others,' said the Count, with a warning gesture. 'Who are you?'

"'One of the three hundred citizens who are sworn to revolt to-morrow. The appointed day is fast drawing near, for in ten minutes the great clock will chime the midnight hour, and then, Count Lovetski—*Siberia!*'

"His listener stared in blank amazement, then, regaining his composure, he replied:—

"'So the plot is discovered? I am no coward. When is it settled for me to set out?'

"'At the last stroke of the hour a drosky will await you at the main entrance. The palace is guarded by the soldiery. The others do not start immediately; you are the leader, and will be ready, doubtless.'

"'Quite,' answered Lovetski, for he knew resistance would be useless. He quietly passed his sword to the masker, who took it, smiled again, and disappeared in the crowd. One by one the followers of the Count were singled out by the strange messenger of the Czar, and when the masquerade was over three hundred exiles followed the track of the sledge in which their leader had been hurried away a couple of hours before them on the long, dreary journey to Tomsk.

"SIBERIA!"

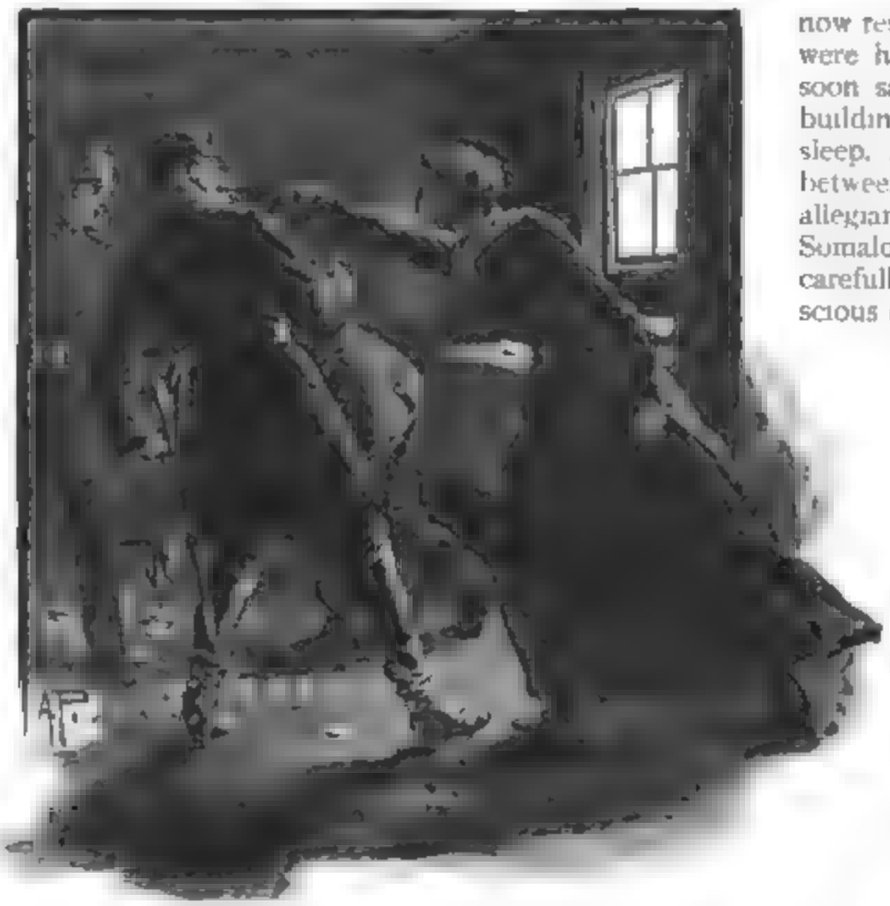
"Lovetski was refused the privilege of communicating his whereabouts to his wife, who shortly after this event died, leaving their daughter to the care of strangers. Before long a rumour reached the capital that the Count had been shot while attempting to escape in disguise, and this was eventually found to be true.

"Scarcely had Marie Lovetski reached womanhood when she joined a political movement, fired with a mad resolve to avenge her father's death, and within a year her name appeared among those on the list of suspects, whose every action was closely observed. A Russian officer of high rank, Paul Somaloff, who had more than once made her an offer of marriage, begged her to remember the fate which overtook Count Lovetski, but the bare mention of it only made the woman more inexorable. The end which everyone foretold soon came, for, seated one day in the midst of treasonable correspondence, Marie Lovetski was surprised by three gendarmes, who burst into her apartment. She tore the letter into fragments before they could stop her, then scattered the pieces over the floor. One of the gendarmes, motioning to his companions to pick them up, moved towards her and attempted her arrest. For one moment the woman stood at bay, then thrust the cold barrel of a pistol into the gendarme's ear.

"'Raise but a hand or move an inch nearer and I will shoot you!' she cried, warningly. Her would be captor shrunk back, and before he had recovered from his surprise Marie Lovetski darted past him towards the door. She seized the handle to wrench it open, then saw that all was lost. The door was locked and the gendarme had removed the key. There was a fierce struggle, in which one of the officers was dangerously wounded, but eventually they secured her, and within two months Marie Lovetski set out to traverse the same dreary road over which the Count had gone long before when she was a mere child.

"Ivan Rachieff, the masquerader who had whispered into Count Lovetski's ear the fate to which he was consigned, was at that time a young attaché at the Court of the Czar. The zeal which he displayed in hunting down the autocrat's enemies rapidly brought promotion, so that when Marie Lovetski was exiled he had risen to be a general of the Russ army, and specially chosen for the duty of heading the Cossacks who conducted the exiles over the Siberian wastes, while among his subordinates was Paul Somaloff, who held a position scarcely inferior to his own.

"Convicted of a double offence, Marie Lovetski was condemned to walk the whole of that wearisome distance among criminals bound for the mines, while the political exiles were somewhat less harshly treated. General Rachieff had been warned that a



"SHE THRUST THE COLD BARREL OF A PISTOL INTO THE GENDARME'S EAR."

band of discontents had threatened to attempt the rescue of the prisoners, and special powers of life and death were granted to him. By long forced marches he hurried the exiles on, scarcely giving them a few hours' rest each night when they arrived at their halting places on the route.

"It was with a deep feeling of sorrow at his inability to lessen her sufferings that Paul Somaloff glanced many times on the way at Marie Lovetski. In spite of the strange position in which he found himself, his love for the woman was by no means lessened, but increased each day as he saw to his dismay how plainly her strength was failing as he looked upon the woman's haggard countenance, who was wearily dragging her limbs forward over the frozen wastes. One day Marie Lovetski's condition became so serious that Somaloff begged General Rachieff to order the fetters which bound her wrists to be removed, receiving in reply a refusal as contemptuous as it was decisive. All that day the exile's secret lover walked moodily on, racking his brains for some method by which to save the woman from dying before even the terrible journey was ended.

"Not far from the hut in which you are now resting, the weary exiles were halted that night, and soon sank down in the log building into an exhausted sleep. After a severe conflict between his love and his allegiance to the Czar, Paul Somaloff rose, and, stealing carefully among the unconscious ones, he bent at last over the form of Marie Lovetski, stretched upon a straw pallet.

"'Marie,' he whispered softly, as he cautiously awakened her. 'Tis I, Paul Somaloff—I come to save you.'

"He remained by the woman's side till he had deftly removed the manacles from her wrists, then stole to the entrance as she silently followed him. Once he was outside the log building, Somaloff made for where his general's horse was stabled, and quickly untethering it led it forth. For one brief moment he clasped the exile to his breast, then lifted her into the saddle and placed the reins in her hand with a few hurried words as to the best course to pursue to avoid pursuit.

"Suddenly Paul Somaloff felt a heavy hand grip him by the shoulder, and turning round he found himself face to face with Ivan Rachieff, his general! At the same time the woman was dragged from the horse and held by three of the Cossacks.

"'Your traitorous plan was well thought out,' said Rachieff, as he smiled in derision at its failure. 'Paul Somaloff, you have broken your oath to the Czar, and I swear you shall die for this.'

"'You may do your worst,' replied the young officer. 'You would not listen to my repeated appeals for a slight act of clemency for Marie Lovetski, and so have turned a loyal subject of the Czar into a traitor.'

"'Insolent!' cried General Rachieff. 'At sunrise you shall be knouted to death.'

"'Coward that you are,' retorted Somaloff, 'that is a punishment you dare not inflict upon one who wears a decoration given to

him by the august Czar. I am a soldier, General, and, at the hands of my comrades, will die a soldier's death.'

"'So be it,' answered Rachieff, calmly; 'you shall be shot at sunrise,' and he motioned to the soldiers who had gathered about him to take Somaloff into their charge, then turned on his heel and strode away, humming an idle air.

"The grey morning had scarcely dawned when brave young Somaloff was blindfolded and led forth to be shot in sight of the exiles, while the woman whom he had failed to save looked helplessly on.

"A few minutes afterwards, Paul Somaloff knelt on the snow-covered plain, the report of a dozen rifles rang out on the morning air, and the exiles saw his arms raised as he clutched convulsively at his breast, then he fell forward, dead!

"The wild, despairing cries of the exiles were quelled with threats of the knout, and then the prisoners were hurried on, as they had been for so many days and weeks past. Ten days later a large number of Polish insurrectionists, ill-armed, and accompanied by a throng of even worse accoutred peasants carrying a red banner, flung themselves upon the line of march, and made a futile effort to break through the soldiers who guarded the exiles. The trained troopers of the Czar thrust them back and, as they broke and fled into the forest, chased and cut them down like sheep, till the snow turned to a crimson hue with their hearts' blood.

"The exiles made desperate efforts to avail themselves of the opportunity to escape which the confusion presented. Those who were unbound fought with branches, which they tore from the stunted trees, while the others madly thrust the shackles upon their wrists into the faces of the brutal soldiery, who knouted or cut down men and women indiscriminately. Long will that massacre be remembered, and the dreadful sufferings which the survivors endured at the command of Ivan Rachieff. When at last Tomsk was reached, only a handful of decrepit exiles passed into the city out of all those who started on the long journey."

"And Marie Lovetski?" I interrupted, "did she live to complete the distance, or what was her fate?"

"It was reported that she was cut down during the massacre," the woman replied, slowly; "for nothing has been heard of her since by General Rachieff, although her body could not be found among the slain."

I glanced at the woman thoughtfully as she concluded her story, and Denviers, who had listened in silence throughout, asked:—

"Where is Marie Lovetski? You are aware that she is alive—nay, more, you know her place of concealment."

Surprised at the directness of the question, the woman involuntarily rose, and then, seeing that we suspected the fugitive was hidden in the log hut, she answered:—

"Marie Lovetski is not here, yet if the

mujik has rightly judged your courage, within a week he will see your sledge return with one more occupant than when it started. Once she is carried there her escape is assured, for——" She stopped suddenly and pointed to the door. We listened attentively as the sound of footsteps drew near, then a heavy blow smote the barred entrance and a voice exclaimed :—

"Open, in the Czar's name!" The woman's face turned ashy pale as she muttered faintly :—

"That is the voice of Ivan Rachieff, who is again in command of the exiles," and she drew away the heavy bar to admit him. We rose to our feet in an instant as the door was flung open and General Rachieff entered and stood before us.

II.

For a moment the Russian officer stared at us without speaking, then throwing back his heavy sealskin cloak and revealing the military garb which he wore beneath, he asked the woman, sternly :—

"What does the presence of these men in your hut mean?"

"We are travellers, who have asked for shelter. Our guide is an Arab; we are Englishmen," responded Denviers, quietly but decisively.

"Spies, I do not doubt," said Rachieff, as he bit his heavy moustache.

"My word is accustomed to be believed," replied my companion, sharply. "If you doubt what I have said, read that," and he flung a package containing our passports upon the table as he spoke.

The officer took out our passports, which we had been careful to obtain. He glanced through them, then tossed the papers on to the table again as he remarked, in a morose tone :—

"You would not be the first Englishmen who have made their way into the Czar's territory only to discredit it."

"You have chosen a curious method of displaying your pleasantry," retorted Denviers, glancing sternly at the heavy-bearded Russian who had so wantonly insulted us. Rachieff drew a chair to the table, and, sitting down, leant his head upon his hands, narrowly scrutinizing our features.

"I saw some horses and a sledge in the shed without," he continued; "are they yours?"

"They are," answered my companion, laconically.

"Where was your last stopping place before you reached here?" Rachieff asked, as if he were examining some prisoners.

"We are neither Russian subjects nor refugees," Denviers replied. "You may save your inquiries for others, since we have no intention of satisfying your ill timed curiosity." My companion turned his back to Rachieff, and raising a blazing piece of pine-wood which had fallen, tossed it again among the glowing embers, taking no more notice of the discomfited officer. Rachieff was nonplussed; he frowned heavily, then rising, moved to the door. He turned as he held it partly open, saying :—

"If you were a Russian gentleman instead of an English spy, I would call you out for your insolence to an officer in the Czar's service."

"NARROWLY SCRUTINIZING OUR FEATURES."

I saw the blood mount to Denviers's forehead as he snatched the driving whip which Hassan held and, striding forward, struck the Russian a blow across his face with it.

"If I were an exile, no doubt you would

knout me for that," he said, quietly. "You can do nothing as it is, since our papers are in order, except fight me."

"I am in command of the exiles," answered Rachieff. "They are now passing yonder; when the halting-place is reached to-night I will leave my subordinate in charge of them and return here with an officer as my second. If you are not a coward you will be here awaiting me at mid-day."

"I shall be here," replied Denviers. "Choose your own weapons; you have brought this meeting about entirely unprovoked, and to-morrow you or I will fall."

"Adieu till then!" cried Rachieff, with a bitter smile of hatred, then he turned his face away, upon which was a long livid mark where the whip had fallen, and we saw him stride towards the exiles passing over the plain before us.

"Ivan Rachieff is one of the most skilful duellists with sword or pistol in the Czar's army," said the woman, who had been an attentive observer of all that passed between the two men. "He will kill you with as little remorse as he ordered Paul Somaloff to be shot by the soldiers."

"Paul Somaloff!" exclaimed Denviers. "Ah! I had forgotten his fate for a moment; but to-morrow, when Rachieff and I stand face to face, I will surely remember it."

"Allah and Mahomet help the sahib," cried Hassan. "If the bearded Russ should chance to win, he shall fight the Arab afterwards."

"Never mind Rachieff, Hassan," said Denviers; "we must at once make our plans for the purpose of helping Marie Lovetski to escape from Siberia. Whatever happens to me, she must be saved at all hazards."

"Where is the woman concealed?" I asked the one who was our hostess.

She rose and questioned us:—

"Will you swear by the memorial which I have raised over Paul Somaloff's resting-place never to speak of what you may see in the strange hiding-place to which I may conduct you?"

"We will," I answered briefly, as Denviers joined in assenting.

We lost little time after Rachieff's departure, but drew together and discussed the probabilities of various plans succeeding, and at last decided on that which seemed to promise success. The dusk rapidly closed in upon us as we sat in thoughtful conversation, after which the woman rose, and, having scanned the plain near the hut as well as she could in the gloom, motioned to us to follow her.

Hassan remained in the hut while we set out, and making our way through a part of the pines and firs close to the dwelling in which we had sought shelter, we found ourselves groping blindly along, following each other like phantoms in the darkness which enveloped us. So far there was little need for the woman to have sworn us to secrecy, for neither going nor returning did we get a glimpse of anything likely to indicate the spot to us again at any future time. At last we felt what appeared to be a rough flight of stone steps beneath our feet, then our guide lit a pine-wood torch which she carried.

Holding up the flickering light before us, the woman led us into what we conjectured to be one of the catacombs of an ancient city. On both sides of us as we moved along the red flare of the pine-wood revealed many bodies of the dead, each stretched in a niche cut for it in the red rock, while at intervals between these we saw the resting-places of others distinguished by various strange emblems. One of these niches was silently guarded by two carved figures of horsemen with their white steeds caparisoned, and each of the riders held in his uplifted hand a sword such as the Damascenes use.

"A strange resting-place that," I remarked to Denviers, as it stood out weird and ghastly in the light of the torch. "No Russian soldiery ever wear such accoutrements as are depicted there, I am certain."

"They wear the garb of boyars of the time of Ivan the Terrible," our guide said, as she pointed to the mounted horsemen. "Where the pine forest about us is now there stood more than four hundred years ago one of the many cities built by that extraordinary monarch, but it has long been blotted out, and the Russ have forgotten its very existence. None now know of its catacombs save those of us who form a secret band, and whose object is to help the exiles who may escape and seek shelter and a safe hiding-place. Even now it would be impossible for you to find the one you seek, and if you wish to go farther it must be done blindfolded, or I will not lead you."

We stood by the strangely carved horsemen, and having consented to the woman's request, allowed her to fasten our sashes securely over our eyes; then, led by her, we slowly advanced through what appeared to be a labyrinth of ways until we were stopped by someone who spoke to the woman in a calm, grave tone. There was a whispered conversation between the two, directly following which our eyes were uncovered, and we

found ourselves facing a strangely-robed hermit. His long white beard fell almost to his waist, contrasting forcibly with the black garment which covered him, while his high forehead and the steadfast look directed towards us seemed to be in keeping with the hermit's strange surroundings. A heap of blazing pine-wood lit up his retreat and served to lessen the intense coldness of the air.

"WE FOUND OURSELVES FACING A STRANGELY-ROBED HERMIT."

"You are Englishmen, and have promised to help Marie Lovetski to escape from here to our next station of refuge," he said. "Since the day when she fled she has been hidden in various of our secret places. Six months ago she was brought here, yet so dangerous is the risk that we have waited for the mujik's messengers, telling us that all is safe for her to be conveyed there. He says in his message that you can be trusted, and doubtless your passports will help you to accomplish the task more easily than Russ or Pole could do. We trust, then, in your honour, that once Marie Lovetski is in your keeping, you will die in her defence rather than surrender her to the horrors of a mine."

We explained to the hermit the difficulty which the approaching duel between Denviers and Rachieff might cause, and discussed with him the possibility of overcoming it. Denviers was emphatic in his determination to meet the Russian on the morrow, and so it was arranged that at a certain hour Marie Lovetski should leave the catacombs and secretly watch the result of the duel. If Denviers escaped uninjured we were to mount our sledge and make for the spot where she would be stationed, and hiding her beneath the wraps, to start on our long journey back to the mujik who had intrusted us with the task of saving her.

"You will, of course, allow us to see this exile?" Denviers remarked, as soon as everything was arranged. "It was for that purpose that we were brought here to-night."

"Then your visit has been made in vain," was the unexpected reply. "It will be time enough for you to do so if your duel with Rachieff is successful."

We endeavoured to overcome the hermit's objection, but, although the woman who had guided us there spoke strenuously on our behalf, the strange guardian of Marie Lovetski was not to be persuaded from following his own cautious plan. Finding our protests useless, we consented to be blindfolded once more, and were led back through the catacombs into the forest, and before long we had entered the log hut again. There we threw ourselves on our sheepskin wraps in front of the pine-wood fire, and laid down upon them to sleep; then, when daylight came, the woman awoke us and we passed the morning vaguely wondering what the result of the duel would be.

Denviers urged upon our guide, Hassan,

and myself the necessity of attempting to save the woman so long shut up in the dismal catacombs, and at last I gave a reluctant consent to do so if he fell, instead of making an attempt to avenge him. The Arab stolidly refused to do this, and justified his position by numerous quotations from the Koran, while declaring that Mahomet would certainly come to my companion's assistance, which, in spite of the gravity of his position, provoked a smiling retort from Denviers. Little did we know what the termination of the fight would be, or the strange part in it which Marie Lovetski was to have.

III.

"HARK, sahibs!" exclaimed Hassan. "Although noon has not yet come, the Russian is approaching to keep his promise to fight."

We threw open the door of the hut and distinguished the ringing sound of the bells of a distant sledge. A few minutes after this the cracking of a whip and the neighing of horses were heard, and finally we saw the sledge appear before us. There were three occupants, and as it drew near we distinguished among them General Rachieff as the one who was urging on the horses. The conveyance dashed up to the hut; then one of the officers sprang out and restrained the animals, while a second, who carried a couple of swords, followed close behind Rachieff, with whom Denviers was soon to try conclusions.

"The weapons are here," said General Rachieff, frigidly, as Denviers approached and bowed slightly. "There is no time to lose: we fight with swords as you see. Choose!" and he motioned to his second, who held them out. Following out the plan which we had determined to adopt, Hassan quickly placed our horses in our own sledge and drew them a little ahead, so that the conveyance should be ready for us to enter when the duel was ended, if my companion did not fall in the encounter.

"We fight there," said Denviers calmly, as he motioned to the part of the plain to the right of where Hassan had already stationed our sledge.

"As you will," responded Rachieff indifferently, and, accompanied by his second, he moved to the spot Denviers pointed out. There the usual formalities were settled by the other officer and myself, whereupon the two duellists made ready and waited for the signal to begin, which fell to my lot to give.

I fluttered a handkerchief in the biting air for a moment, dropped it, and the swords were rapidly crossed. The reputation which Rachieff had won as a duellist was certainly well deserved, since his feints and thrusts were admirable, while Denviers, whose coolness in critical circumstances never deserted him, acted mainly on the defensive, parrying his enemy's lunges with remarkable skill.

More than once the duellists stopped as if by mutual consent, to regain breath, then quickly facing each other again, fought more determinedly than ever. Rachieff saw that for once he had apparently met his match with the sword, and grew by degrees more cautious than he had been when the fight began; yet repeatedly he failed to completely ward off the quick lunges from my companion's weapon, and I saw the crimson stains of blood which marked where the sword point had touched him. Then he rained in his blows with lightning speed, pressing hard upon Denviers several times, and glaring furiously at him, while his distorted features showed plainly enough the mark of the blow he had received from the whip the day previous.

"Rachieff wins!" cried the Russian's second, and I saw, to my dismay, Denviers's weapon suddenly twisted from his hand and flung into the air, while an exultant exclamation burst from Rachieff's lips as he rushed upon his defenceless opponent! Before he could make use of the advantage which he had unexpectedly gained, Marie Lovetski uttered a wild, mournful cry, and started forward from the pine forest, standing pale with momentary fear before him!

The superstitious Russian stared incredulously, his sword-arm dropped to his side, while he gasped out:—

"Lovetski's daughter, and yet she is surely dead!"

Taking full advantage of the Russian's dismay, Denviers instantly flung himself upon his foe, dashing him backwards to the ground. Kneeling upon his enemy's chest and gripping him by the throat, as he held the sword he had seized before the startled Russian, my companion hissed in his ear:—

"Yield, or you are a dead man!"

The Russian's face turned to a purple hue as he almost choked for breath, then he muttered brokenly the exiled woman's name.

"She is living!" cried Denviers, as he lowered the point of the sword till it touched the Russian's breast. "Swear that you will not attempt to hinder her flight, and I will release your throat."

General Rachieff raised his hand in sign of assent, for his voice had failed him.

"HE RUSHED UPON HIS DEFENCELESS OPPONENT."

Denviers rose, whereupon the Russian staggered to his feet, then, mad at his defeat, moved over to where his sledge was.

"Get the woman into our sledge," cried Denviers to me. I started forward to where Hassan was; we snatched up the exile and immediately drove off.

"After them, men!" cried Rachieff, caring nothing for his promise. "We will take Marie Lovetski, or shoot her down!"

"Never trust a Russ, sahibs!" exclaimed Hassan, as he lashed our horses on, while our enemies followed furiously behind. "The only way to secure his silence would have been a sword thrust through the false one's heart."

Away our sledge was whirled across the plain, faster and faster still, yet Rachieff, whose horses were more numerous than our own, drew gradually nearer. Marie Lovetski, who had forgotten her alarm now that Denviers was safe, turned her pale-set countenance towards our pursuers, and, as she did so, the report of a pistol rang out, while a bullet whizzed past her head! I saw Rachieff holding the smoking weapon in his hand as Denviers cried to me:—

"If he fires again, I will shoot him like the dog that he is!"

"No," cried Marie Lovetski, snatching a pistol from my sash before I could prevent her. "Rachieff slew Somaloff, my lover, and I will avenge him." She pointed the weapon full at the Russian, and I barely had time to brush her arm aside before the frenzied exile fired. Fortunately, the shot was deflected, and Rachieff was saved from the fate that he certainly deserved.

"Shoot their horses!" exclaimed Denviers, and as our own dashed along he leant over towards the pursuing sledge and fired at the foremost of them. The animal reared for a moment, then fell dead, throwing the rest into confusion. Out the Russians sprang, and cut the traces through, and having in this way speedily managed to disencumber their steeds of the dead one, they immediately began the pursuit again. We waited for them to get near again, then fired in quick succession and brought down their other horses, in spite of the bullets which the Russians rained upon us, and which, fortunately, struck none who were in the sledge. Baffled in their pursuit, we saw our enemies standing knee-deep in the snow watching us as we dashed along.

"Well," remarked Denviers, as we slackened our speed at last, "we have had a strange running fight, such as I least of all expected."

"The sahibs have saved the woman," said our guide. "Their slave the Arab believes that even the Great Prophet would approve of what they have done. The promise to convey Marie Lovetski to the mujik's hut will now surely be kept"; and so it came about, for the daughter of Lovetski the Lost lived to find freedom hers on another soil and under another flag.